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A FAREWELL TO INDIA

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

*Fiction*

AN INDIAN DAY  
THESE MEN THY FRIENDS  
NIGHT FALLS ON SIVA'S HILL  
IN ARABY ORION

*Poetry*

COLLECTED POEMS  
THE THRACIAN STRANGER

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CRUSADER'S COAST

# A FAREWELL TO INDIA

EDWARD THOMPSON



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To  
CHARLES ST. A. VIVIAN

### *PREFATORY NOTE*

Some of the persons in this story are also in  
*An Indian Day* (Knopf, 1927).

I should have called this book *Goblin Leaguer*,  
but feared that the title would seem obscure.

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A FAREWELL TO INDIA

## I

THE ZILA, OR GOVERNMENT, SCHOOL OF VISHNUGRAM was holding its Prize-giving. The hall was packed with the local gentry and their sons. On the meagre, discontented faces of the masters appeared a look of pleasure and importance. Antiquated hand-punkahs faintly disturbed the dead air of the sweltering May afternoon.

The programme had run about a third of its deadly course. The revels had opened with Prayer, in Sanskrit, Persian, and English; to a song about kindness to animals had succeeded a highly rhetorical passage from the favourite national epic, Michael Datta's *Death of Meghnad*, which was followed by another 'shong', *Atamon Harvest*. This title Robert Alden, educational missionary of twenty years' experience, easily identified as *Autumn Harvest*. The next item, 'A Gural concerning a testy pare of Cakes', gave ingenuity a sterner task. He had declined the seat on the platform to which his eminence in the Vishnugram educational world entitled him, and, arriving late, had sought a coign of semi-concealment. Now, behind his pillar, he scanned the dimly typed sheet,

puzzled. There was nothing for it but to wait the event, which proved to be an excessively improbable dramatisation of the incident of an English king in exile carelessly letting some cakes burn.

A Sanskrit recitation came next; and made way for the *chef-d'œuvre*, a local production. Another dialogue in English, this celebrated the Chairman's unselfish exertions on the community's behalf. Manoranjan Chatterji, District Magistrate, had continued the Agricultural Exhibitions which had done so much for this corner of rural Bengal, and had added a good many pots of eyewash of which his predecessor, their establisher, had never thought.

A boy questioned his friend about his excitements of the Easter vacation.

'Now, Jadu, I am glad to mitt with you again, my dear friend.'

'Many grittings to you al-so, my good Madu. I trust that by the bless-ing of God you are stout and strong.'

'Thank you, I am bhery well. And you too, my dear Jadu?'

'Thank you, I al-so am stout and strong. And what have you sinn at Vishnugram lettly, that has inter-ested you, my dear Madu?'

'Oh, we have had so inter-esting an experience. And it has been of excidding profit al-so, I do assure you.'

'Indidd! May I know what this experience has been?'

'Oh, we have held an Agricultural Exhibition.'

During the detailed (not to say fulsome) account which followed, dull and curmudgeonly would have been the man who was unmoved by the delight on the Chairman's face, as he bent eagerly forward and drank in praises of his prowess. Alden was neither dull nor curmudgeonly, and the uncomfortable May heats were lightened for him. Keats thought the most beautiful sight in the world was that of a young girl innocently happy. But Keats had never seen an Indian Civil Service official innocently happy. Alden remembered old theologies, in which the Heavenly Sultan was depicted at ease on his Olympus, listening while choirs of youths and maidens singly encircled the priests who performed the sacrifice's more substantial honours. He could imagine the smile of benevolent bliss over-spreading features that loomed so differently above a thunderbolt.

'And to whom are we indebted for this so instructive and helpful an experience?'

'Oh, *that* is our good kind Magistrate, Mr. Manoranjan Chatterji I. Shec. Esh, Esquire, O.B.E., I.Esh.O.'

'And what can we do, my dear Madu, to show our gratitude for his excidding kindness and goodness?'

'Oh, we can *love* him and *thank* him and *honour* him *all* our lives.'

As this satisfying *dénouement* was reached, both turned to presiding Jove—who had signified his 'taking' of each point, by beaming nods—and simultaneously salaamed. There were thunders of applause.

Alden (perhaps fallaciously) ascribed his week of poor health that ensued, to an internal twist sustained during this happy performance. He held in high regard those public proprieties which he so rarely observed; it was 'on his forehead',<sup>1</sup> he explained apologetically, that he should so often feel an unseemly hilarity when wiser men were impressed. Self-distrust, even more than modesty, was the reason why he was not on the platform, co-opted into the society of the triumvirate there (if purists will forgive the use of this term for a group of which two were ladies, his wife and his sister-in-law, Mrs. Vincent Hamar). Mrs. Hamar was to give the prizes away.

The Headmaster rose to give his Report. He was a shifty, small, miserable-looking man, of whom little was known except that he went in terror of Nationalists and of Government alike, that he was a fervent devotee of the goddess Kali, and a no less fervent devotee of *gunja*.<sup>2</sup> However, his Report was as satisfactory as the rest of the performance.

<sup>1</sup> The skull sutures are each man's written destiny.

<sup>2</sup> A drug.

'The dishipline of this i-shkole,' he announced in shrill tones, 'has been *bhery good*.'

To his statements, interesting in themselves, he added piquancy by the manner of their delivery. When his voice neared the end of each sentence, it took the last two words at a rush, like a man skipping from shark-infested waters on to firm ground.

'One boy has been expelled for particularly—*disgraceful conduct*. And sebheral have received sebhore—*corporal chastisement*.'

Hand-clapping and applause, presumably not joined in by the participants in this excellent record.

At this point Mr. Robert Alden went out hastily, and did not return.

## II

HIS GOING WAS UNFORTUNATE, SINCE HE MISSED AN improving tale by the Government Pleader, who moved a Vote of Thanks at the close. This turned on discipline; it was of the Duke of Wellington gliding up behind a young soldier who was writing home when he should have been resting. The Duke read the letter through, and said: 'Now write that you are going to be shot at dawn to-morrow'. 'And,' Praphulla Babu concluded in groaning sepulchral tones, his eycs looming through a matted mournful face, 'the boy was shott. Only etteen years of age! It

is this shtrong shensh of dishipline that has med the Eengleesh what they are.'

Again applause all round.

This question of discipline had been taking up a deal of Alden's thought lately. With Douglas, the Principal, away on furlough, he was in charge of the College, and his known sympathy with Indian ways had led to many acts which he recognised wrathfully as a 'try-on'. Strikes might be considered endemic, but had been quiescent since the Nationalist Movement took a turn towards directer violence. They were cropping up again in Calcutta collcges. Hitherto they had struck only sparks at Vishnugram, quickly trodden out. But this happy state was passing. A student, who claimed still all rights and privileges of membership, had taken a fictitious name and the style of 'President of the Independant Students' Asocciation'. As such, from time to time he kindly notified Alden that a strike was off, or on (as the case might be). To ensure a closer and more exasperated attention to these communications, he invariably sent them 'bearing'.<sup>1</sup> But he had calculated without Alden's industry and memory. Individual eccentricities of spelling and idiom had struck a responsive chord in the latter; Alden had ferreted out old examination papers, established identity beyond a doubt, and expelled his rival. But the President of

<sup>1</sup> Unstamped.

the Independant Students' Asocciation possessed many male relations, pertinacious men. Against the injustice of the harassed Englishman's deed they protested, and found allies everywhere. They had got at the District Magistrate, who had butted into what was Alden's business. It is true that the butting was feeble, and the rebuttal had been vigorous; but it had annoyed Alden. The Calcutta Indian Press, amid its greater affairs, had made time to express its pain and disappointment with one whose ways and words had occasionally won the approval of the right-thinking. Alden stood fast, of course. But peace had forsaken his paths.

Emerging from the constriction and repression experienced under the Headmaster's address, he took the jungle road. The world was torrid; flung out—for his escape had been rapid, as from a building on fire—into its blaze, he had that feeling of increased eye-power, as though new lenses had been thrust within his pupils, which the Indian sun suddenly entered brings. It made him light-hearted, for all the discomfort. (Yet that, after all, had been worse inside than it was here.) As he swung along, 'The dishipline', he assured himself, 'of this i-shkole has been *bhery good*. One boy—'

He got no farther. As if a wood-spirit, disentangling itself from verdure and waxing visible, a man grew obvious from the lantana scrub by the way.

'Thou art he, without a doubt,' said the apparition.

'I am who, Brother?'

'He for whom this note is. I went to thy house, but they told me thou wast at the Zila i-shkole. Therefore I waited for thee at the roadside. Jayananda Sadhu gave me certain signs by which I might know thee.'

'What were those signs?'

'Said the Sadhu: He is one long of body, and with arms that swing loosely. If thou comest on him alone, it is like that he will be acting as one whom the gods have afflicted with madness.'

'Without question,' Alden agreed urbanely, 'thy letter is for me.'

The messenger, to whom all irony was but the scattering of thistleseed and madness a trivial token such as those others of feature and complexion which the gods set upon men, delivered his letter, and withdrew.

Unfolding the note, Alden read: 'Fire in the night, O dreams! The Dying Patriot.'

These cryptic words were effective to efface from his mind the discipline of the i-shkole. 'The Dying Patriot? What does the ass mean? *He* isn't dying, by a long chalk. And I'm not sure that he's much of a patriot.' For it pleased Robert Alden, when by himself, to adopt the pose of the diehard cynic distrust-

ful of all zeal but his own and convinced that Gandhi is in Soviet pay.

'Dying Patriot? Fire in the night? Fire in fiddlesticks!'

Pondering, he turned into a bypath leading to the region of wilderness and forsaken temples. It would have brought him to the Red Tank, that swampy relic of the old days of Hindu glory, when all this desolation was irrigated verdure. But first it crossed a single railway line, which connected Vishnugram with the ferry of the Samodar River, twenty-eight miles away, and the dark industrial towns beyond. About a hundred yards back from the line stood a stone-built bungalow, recalling a tale which he had never doubted or tested. In 1926, an ascetic had come, when the bungalow had just been built and was not yet occupied. He had made his home here; in reply to protest he had been humble and reasonable, asking leave for but a month's stay. During that month he prepared a room as a Siva temple. The place, thus dedicated, could no longer be used as a dwelling, and the cheated owner had been forced to avoid it ever since. The holy man kept it as an occasional residence.

There was a garden, which after a prosperous opening had gone to jungle. Green fountains of quisqualis sprayed out colour and fragrance; guavas straggled up out of the tangle of jujube-thorn; an

avenue of bush-jasmine persisted along the remnant of a path. The place's glory was a cluster of pomegranates, that had found soil and station to their liking. Even now points of ruddy bloom glowed in their polished leaves. The tallest tree, thrusting red tips above a crumbling wall, caught Alden's attention. The mysterious message in his hand had touched a rhythmic vein, and he was set off to Keble's lines:

'Far seen across the sandy wild,  
Where, like a solitary child,  
    He thoughtless roamed and free,  
One towering thorn was wrapped in flame!  
Bright without blaze it went and came!  
    Who would not turn and see?"

The interloper was not in residence; this was India, where estates are not fenced, nor are even houses over-private, except in their women's apartments; Alden was without prejudices; the gate was open. He went in at the entrance, and into the house. He looked in at the room that had been sanctified; a mud *lingam*<sup>1</sup> stood up from the floor, on to which a breeze had blown bel-leaves through a broken window. Another room showed that the holy man found smoking and spitting great aids to meditation. And there were ashes, where he had been burning papers.

Alden picked up a fragment of what had been a letter, and glanced at it, idly enough. He read;

<sup>1</sup> Conical emblem of Siva.

'... house-warming to knights. Jatin shall be Prometheus. Prometheus was firegod of Greek . . .'

Followed a Sanskrit tag, which he recognised as the Vedic invocation: '*Agnim ile purohitam.*' 'I worship Agni the Priest.'

Instantly that elusive quotation slid into his memory. Of course. It was from Flecker's *Dying Patriot*. But identification of source was the least of his interest. He knew that Jayananda was still, in subterranean, unsannyasilike ways, a fancier of English poetry; Alden himself had lent him volumes from the College Library, and presented him with others. Even so, Arabindo Ghosh, in retreat at Pondicherry, varies his meditations on the *Gita* with pronouncements on prosody. And why not? For did he not in far-off peaceful days—or ever the Partition of Bengal was dreamed of, and years before the Parcae saw the stuff of modern Nationalism approaching their shuttles—write the best blank verse any foreigner ever achieved? So to Alden it was no marvel that a phrase from Flecker should be tossed at him out of the Indian jungle. But this fire-theme was a beckoning swamp-elf. He uncrumpled the Sadhu's note, and examined it again. Surely in front of 'night' was another letter, crossed through but left legible? It was a *k*. 'Fire in the knight.' 'House-warming to knights.'

He had it. 'Jatin shall be Prometheus. Prometheus was firegod of Greek'. A connoisseur in these matters,

he appreciated the mixture of grimness, humour, and scholarship that marked the bloodier manifestations of revolutionary Nationalism. It was good of the writer to explain who Prometheus was, even if (to those pedantic enough to ask for accuracy rather than colour) the explanation was not all an explanation might be. And it was very meet, right—excellent, fitting, and entirely characteristic—that he should end with piety, honouring Agni the Priest! But who was Jatin? Never mind. The thing was to get home at once, and take steps against the house-warming prepared for his knights.

### III

HIS WIFE AND SISTER-IN-LAW WERE REFRESHING themselves with tea. Having forgotten the Prize-giving, he stared bewildered when reproved for behaviour now cast as far behind him as the Rains of yesteryear.

'I despair of seeing you ever get any consideration for others,' said his wife. 'It was most embarrassing for Hilda and me.'

With the passage of time, Mrs. Alden had come to realise that her husband was beyond reclamation. He saw he was in disgrace, but that judgment was going to be tempered with mercy. Relieved, he was nevertheless puzzled.

'Embarrassing for Hilda?' queried the sinner, dazed. 'Embarrassing for you? Embarrassing for you and Hilda?'

'She means your going out when Charu Babu was telling us about the dishipline of his i-shkole,' prompted Hilda, seeing to her amazement that his perplexity was genuine. 'I envied you your being able to go. It was *agony* for us, having to sit in that exalted place which was ours, thanks to our connection with you—

" by merit raised  
To that bad eminence." "

'O . . . oh! You mean Charu Babu's show,' said Alden, enlightened. 'I thought that was yesterday.'

Looks of deepened astonishment were turned on him.

'Thought it was yesterday! Really, Rob!'

'Robin, Robin, why do you do it?' asked Hilda. 'You've been out here long enough to know that prize-givings are just as funny as they are in dear old England. Why haven't you developed a technique of control? You know that to these people you are not simply Robin Alden, rather a dear when you get to know him and not outstandingly obnoxious even before that. You are a standard-bearer of the Raj, which evil-minded folk are abusing. You are a Pillar of Christianity, and the Acting Principal of a great

educational institution, in what is to all intents and purposes a university town.'

'I did my best, honestly. I even told a sort of lie, to make sure of a way of escape. I told Charu Babu that I'd much better be at the back, because I was liable to be called out early, for some job that had to be done at the College. I said: "I don't for one minute suppose that I shall be able to stay through the whole meeting. But it's most awfully decent of you to want me on the platform".'

'You've *always* been the same way,' Frances reminded him.

'No. Only when I'm extra tired.'

'Yes. Always,' Hilda corroborated. 'Before you were engaged to Frankie, when you came down to stay with us in Somerset, King Edward VII died—'

'Hang it all, you're surely not going to bring that up against me! I was as much taken aback as anyone.'

'We accept that. But Dad made us all go to church, to hear what the Rector had to say by way of a memorial sermon. And even on that awful occasion you made us all conspicuous.'

'Well! I ask you both! Frankie, Hilda, listen to me, be reasonable! When a man starts off with the remark that "The suddenness of the late King's death makes it seem almost a tragedy", what sort of a response has he the right to expect?'

'You were the only one who thought it funny,' his wife retorted.

'Ah! But you see, it was in Somerset.'

'Robin!' said Hilda. 'You are not to dare to say one word in disparagement of Somerset!'

He stood in an attitude of deprecation, his palms together.

'Let him have a cup of tea, Frankie, if he *is* in the dock,' begged Hilda. 'You can't keep even a convicted criminal from necessary nourishment. You *are* thirsty, aren't you, Rob?'

'You bet I am. I wondered how much longer Frankie was going to keep me in the pangs of drouth. While you folk were drinking in Charu Babu's eloquence, I've been round by the Samodar Railway as far as the deserted bungalow. But I'd like fresh tea.'

#### IV

WHEN THE COLLEGE GROUNDS WERE PURCHASED, THE sole building, in forty acres of crowded and useless mango-orchard, was a tiny bungalow nestling amid jack-trees. It had been built thirty years before, for William Knight, District Collector of Vishnugram. Now it was the Knight Hostel, used for a handful of students, and under perpetual sentence of demolition, scarcely needed in a compound studded with jail-like dormitories, depressing two-storeyed bulks.

orders. Room could be found for the dozen inmates in another hostel, which housed over eighty students; moreover, it had wide verandas on double storeys, and massy gates, locked each dusk. He brushed away protest. He could be brusque and unbending, and was so now.

Then he began to think aloud.

'Suppose I ask Mayhew for a guard. Next, let it be granted, as Euclid Babu demands, that the guard don't doze off. A pretty big assumption, that!' He ran swiftly over the chain of events, from one sequel to another. 'The arson will merely be postponed. You can't keep a guard for ever. There would come a day when Mayhew said harsh things, that I imagined what wasn't there, and so on. Would withdraw his fine fellows. Then the whole place would go up in a blaze!'

The longest pair of hands in India shot up in graphic illustration.

## V

HE CARRIED HIS MOOD WITH HIM, BURSTING IN DISquietingly on tubby, middle-aged Mayhew. Mayhew was made for a placid existence, such as had gone from the Englishman's hopes in India for ever. He was in combative mind, from prickly heat and Government correspondence. He listened impatiently, then broke out, 'Why the devil have you wrecked the whole show?'

'How have I wrecked it?' asked Alden, with some indignation.

'If you'd left your boy where he was, we'd have caught someone useful. Now everyone'll know that we had word something was up, and we shall never catch those fellows.'

'So you think I ought to have let my boys be burnt to death in their beds!'

'I'd have given you a guard.'

'Thanks! I couldn't trust one.'

'Why are you chaps always crabbing the police?'

'I'm not. But I know their limitations. They're large, heavy-footed upcountrymen—'

'What else do you expect them to be? If you're set down in a lot of damned, cowardly Bengalis—'

'They're not cowardly. They're liable to panic, which is a different thing.'

'They're no good for police, anyway. You've got to fetch in upcountrymen, to do their dirty work for them. And upcountrymen—'

'Are no fairies on their feet,' Alden said, in a tone implying concession. It soothed Mayhew unawares, before he had gathered that its import was the same as that of the first statement that he had been controverting. 'They'd be seen without seeing. They'd never spot what was going on behind that screen of jacks round the hostel.'

'They would, if I set them right in the trees.'

'Yes. And put the wind up my boys! I'd have them gibbering for weeks, when they should be sleeping. And how long are you prepared to keep your folk watching, before you tell me that I've been imagining things?"

'And that's true,' Mayhew conceded.

'I've told you that I don't care an O.B.E. what happens to the hostel. It's insured, and a bonfire would be cash in our pocket. I've got to pull it down some time, at our own expense. But I'm not keen on having murder on our premises. So I told the boys to clear out.'

## VI

EARLIER THAN DAWN NEXT MORNING, ALDEN WOKE TO a sense of some urgency tugging at his consciousness. He listened; and through the dimness and deathly silence caught a low sobbing. He was on his veranda in a moment. A student, one Manmathanath Chaudhuri, was weeping in ecstasy of subdued terror.

'They beat me. Oh, sir, they beat me.' He held up swollen hands. 'They have murdered Hari. They beat me.' He collapsed on the floor, but continued his wail.

'Where is Hari?'

'He is in the Knight. Murderers have come and killed him. They beat me.'

Alden was thunderstruck. 'But the Knight Hostel was empty. I told everyone to clear out.'

Manmatha evaded the issue, by falling to his lament again. Alden postponed the lesser enquiry, and strode across the compound. In the Hostel he was confronted by the sight of Harindranath De sitting like a Buddha in a pool of blood, as if he had died in that posture. The bed, the floor, his slippers, were all blood.

He was not dead. But no coherent word came from him. Speech snuffled through blood-clogged passages, and was smothered. Alden looked closer, and saw that his nose had been chopped across. It was an old trick, to prevent a victim crying out. His assailants had done this first of all; then, holding the boy down, they had slashed his forehead with a heavy knife above both eyes, just avoiding the brain, and his chin. He was disfigured for life. All this Alden knew later; but the main outlines were salient now, as he looked pitifully at the figure before him.

The maimed boy was taken to the hospital. The College became a hive of busy ineffectuals; police took over the hostel, Manmatha was questioned, Mayhew and Alden examined all approaches.

'What's the use of looking for footprints?' said Mayhew in despair. 'The soil's baked hard. Better go into the records of some of your blessed students. What's this boy that's been cut up been doing?'

'What do you think he's been doing?'

'Meddling with someone else's womenfolk, undoubtedly.'

'He's always seemed a decent enough boy.'

'Those are the biggest rotters.' As he said this, Mayhew was self-apologetic for voicing a platitude of his service. 'Haven't you ever seen the secret instructions of the Revolutionary Committee?'

'Ages ago. Douglas tells me they existed when he first came out, way back before 1910. You mean all that stuff forbidding the good young revolutionary to break College rules, and telling him to go for early morning constitutionals and above all to keep his bowels open? Warning him to avoid boys who talk a lot, or are great social birds, or go in for noisy brag about oppression and love of country, and so on?'

'Well, doesn't this boy fit the bill?'

'Yes. In every way but one. No, in every way but several. But you're like all other Government servants, you're dead sure (and I don't blame you for it) that Nationalism is at the bottom of every darned thing that happens.'

'So it is.'

'I thought you said this had a woman at the bottom of it.'

'That doesn't mean there's no Nationalism in it.'

'All right. If this boy is what you say, a young

revolutionary thug, why has he got it in the neck himself, instead of giving it to other folk?"

'He's been threatening to turn traitor.' But Mayhew thrust the theory forward less confidently.

'Why was he fool enough to remain in the hostel against my orders, when he knew—even if no one else knew—that folk outside were after the chaps there? I'm afraid you'll have to find him guiltless. I'm going to take another look at that bed.'

They turned the bed upside down. Not content with ocular examination, Alden put his nose close.

'Smell that.'

Mayhew did.

'What do you make of it?'

'Smells like kerosene.'

'It *is* kerosene.' In his excitement, Alden had recourse to Brer Rabbit's ecstatic findings. 'It looks like sparrergrass, it smells like sparrergrass, it tastes like sparrergrass—and shiver my timbers if it ain't sparrergrass! And look here, Mayhew! See this chalk mark on the door? Listen to me, Watson. That bed was soaked with kerosene yesterday. I'm hanged if I know why no one spotted it, except that they sometimes seem incapable of spotting anything. The door was marked as a guide. It all fits like a glove, except that they didn't fire the bed when they got in. Why didn't they? We know that they carried torches.'

Manmatha's tale, for all its gaps and obstinate evasions, had yielded up some truth. The directing party remained in impenetrable shadow; but their tools were guessed, correctly though without anything that would be legal corroboration, to be members of the local Mohammedan community, out of which you could hire lusty thieves, cattle-maimers, or murderers, as you wished. No doubt the cause of quarrel lay in some invasion of a zenana of more respectable status. Everyone in the hostel must have known the actual offender, but not one would ever indicate him. Manmatha and Harindra, secure in the knowledge that *they* were not the persons threatened, and unwilling to leave the comfort and familiarity of their rooms, had remained, disobedient to Alden's orders. They had done more, they had shifted to the room whose door was chalked. It was the airiest room, the one that had some semblance of wind-current on these breathless nights. Just on dawn, masked men had entered with blazing torches, had struck down the boy on the kerosened bed and brutally mutilated him. His companion, grovelling, had offered them the keys of his box. 'I said, "Take my all money! Take my all things! Do not murder me, please!"' Though robbery was no part of their errand, they had complied, gaining a matter of less than twenty rupees. It had diverted them from a further intention, that of firing the bed—unless, per-

haps, in their orders disfigurement had been substituted for murder. Possibly the sight of their victim wretched in his blood had stirred some springs of forbidden pity. And they had amused themselves with scorching the hands of their miserable suppliant.

Then they had gone, as suddenly as they came.

### VII

THAT EVENING, MAYHEW DROPPED ROUND TO SEE Alden. Alden had long chairs put out on the *chabutra*, the stone platform where you can sit out of doors on an Indian night, just uplifted from snakes.

Mayhew looked round cautiously. 'Where are the ladies?'

'Packing. They're off to-night. I see them as far as Sealdah, and then Hamar takes over.'

For the last dozen years India has been governed by Commissions. Hamar's unprecedented stay in one station was due to the fact that for two years he had been serving on a Commission, a solely Provincial one, on a proposed codification of the law governing political offences. He had gone to Darjeeling with the Bengal Government. His wife, having promised to perform several public duties, her appearance at the Zila School Prize-giving being the last, had stayed down with her sister. Both were now free to get away with the children.

Mayhew dug round in his pipe, lit it to his satisfaction, then leant back luxuriously. 'I wonder when Hamar's damned Commission will report.'

'Why should it ever report? Except to do what most of these Commissions do—recommend that another Commission meet as soon as possible. We've been like those jolly Russian pictures of our youth—keeping our problems at bay by chucking one child after another to the wolves. Another tough customer leaps out from the whole yelping gang! Toss it a Commission! We are a wonderful people. There is, literally, no end to our political resourcefulness.'

'No end to our damned foolery,' Mayhew growled.

'That's what I said. Thank God my folk are off at last! This Zila School Prize-giving has been a nuisance.' Alden sighed, with the relief of the overburdened man who knows that soon he will have only physical worries to bear.

Mayhew was relieved, too, for he wanted to talk freely. Not that it would serve any purpose, other than that of outlet to his own mood. He admitted that the 'clues' his police had found were worth little.

'Too many liars about. There must be a few hundred folk who know all about the business—daresay my police know. But bless you! No one's going to split on it.'

'Why should they? It would be an unhealthy

action on their part. It's only a boy chopped up; and he doesn't even come from this district. It's bad luck for him. But it was on his forehead, he's earned it somewhere and somehow, even if not here and now.'

'Quite so. And the whole thing's done and over. Why make a fuss about it?'

'My students still care a bit, though,' said Alden presently. He pointed to his great hostel gates. 'I have no end of bother, especially when we've young bloods here from Calcutta, accustomed to late hours and dissipation, to get them all in by nine o'clock, when the gates have to be shut. They shut the gates themselves now, and before it's quite sun-down.'

When men meet at leisure in India, the talk is largely reminiscence. Mayhew took a long cast back.

'My first job was in a tea district. It was in 1909. There was a planter fellow called Kenyon I got rather chummy with. Nice quiet chap with a craze for reading poetry. I was staying with him once when one of his coolies came up and said something in that outlandish hill lingo of theirs. He was awfully respectful; and Kenyon just nodded, and agreed. Then he salaamed and went off. Kenyon laughed and said to me: "D'you know what he was telling me?" "Not a word," I said. "Well," he

said, "my coolies have just held a *panchayat* on me, and fined me a hundred dibs." "What the devil do they think they're doing?" I said. "They say I've been meddling with one of their married girls." "But have you?" I asked him. "Yes". "But you're never going to pay the fine, surely!" "Of course I am," he said.'

'I know,' said Alden. 'When Campbell started his school at Gnarratong, it was a godsend to a good many fellows. They wanted to do the decent thing by the wild oats that were springing up from their earlier days in this country, and now they could. They sent the kids there, to be taught useful trades and set on their feet. Campbell had so many things to do, he was frightfully rushed, and it took him a while to tumble to the fact that it wouldn't do to let his boys keep their fathers' names. At the end of his first year they held a sports day, and a full account was put in the Bombay papers, as an advertisement.'

'I'll bet it was some advertisement!' chuckled Mayhew.

'It was. Some of the prize-winners had the most gloriously aristocratic names, such as Montmorency-Marjoribanks, and that kind of double-barrelled thing. Their fathers had settled down to respectability and had married girls from home; they were leading lights of commerce and government and the

law. It caused considerable activity among Bombay ladies. Mrs. Leveson-Jones scurried round to Mrs. Vavasour-Smith's, taking a copy of the *Asiatic News* with her. She would find Mrs. Vavasour-Smith studying the same literature, with knitted brows. "Isn't it queer?" she'd ask her. "Here's your husband's name in this list. And mine's there also." Campbell discovered there was something up by the sight of a postal peon fagging up the hill with what he thought must be a piano; but it was really a sheaf of telegrams. And almost the same time a specially chartered train packed with sahebs steamed into a Himalayan station, and demanded tongas to go out to Gnarratong. I've heard that Bombay Presidency was left virtually in charge of babus and griffins for a few days. Jayananda Sadhu—'

'Your seditious friend,' interrupted Mayhew.

'Oh, yes,' said Alden cheerfully. 'He's got a surprising lot of scandal tucked away in his memory, for a saint. Of course,' he added, being a man both just and generous, 'a chap can't help remembering some of the things he's once known. Well, he says that when we say Indians are incapable of self-government we forget that once for practically a solid week a good third of India was in the hands of Indian clerks, and nothing went wrong. However, after Campbell altered his methods, there was a coffee planter in the Nilgiris I got to know, who was

awfully worried. He knew I was going up to see Campbell, so begged me to speak to him. He'd heard that his boy was still known by his own name. As a matter of fact, there *had* been a bit of delay in rechristening and the boy *had* been spoken of by his dad's name. I gave the father's message to Campbell. Campbell grinned, and said: "Tell him not to worry. We now call the boy Campbell".'

'He's a splendid fellow, is Campbell!' said Mayhew enthusiastically, adding in elegiac tones, 'If only all missionaries were doing *that* kind of work! There's some sense in it.'

'Ah!' said Alden sympathetically.

'Well, this mess your boy has got into reminded me of those days. It's funny about that Kenyon fellow. Did you ever hear his name before?'

'Yes.'

'Then you know about it?' Mayhew turned to him in some surprise.

'Well—the facts were fairly notorious in a certain restricted circle, weren't they? He was the man who was found dead—with the usual frills that adorn this special kind of murder?'

'Yes. He'd at last gone a bit beyond what his coolies' code permitted to a saheb, so they held another meeting, and condemned him to death. I'd give something—purely as a matter of curiosity—to know what this beauty of yours has been doing.'

'I've told you already that he hasn't done anything. It was some other fellow.'

The conversation made a natural transition to Burma of pre-War days, so had better not be reported further.

### VIII

THAT NIGHT ALDEN ACCOMPANIED HIS PEOPLE TO Calcutta, and next afternoon, at Sealdah Station, saw them on to the Darjeeling train, and into Hamar's charge. Then, aware of immense relief now that he was alone to face the heats, which were mental no less than physical, he returned to his hotel, to wait till the night train took him back to Vishnugram. There was the afternoon to while away, and then the evening.

The afternoon he spent shirtless on a bed, listening to the variegated noise of Calcutta. That noise soothed his brain as nothing else could have done. Its eternal pattern was the steady screaming of the kites, hung in the glazed windless heaven. It came so unfailingly, soaring upward in a spiral of momentarily intensifying desolation and despair, that it was easy to imagine it came from the air itself, a core of mechanical wretchedness uncoiled from the world's heart of emptiness. Illusion, vanity of vanities, the passage of time along corridors of forgetfulness and futility—these things confronted themselves in some

mirror that flashed back a mockery of themselves; and the sight, though itself but a shadow and the reflection of shadows, wrung from unconsciousness the echo of such pain as only sentience can feel. Alden, soaked with the vast heats, prostrate in garments that nothing could keep in their original whiteness for longer than an hour at most, worn after incessant battle with beasts in Ephesus, scarred with fever and watchfulness, now tossed his tiredness down, content to be exhausted. He was forty-four. Had he been an Indian, he would have been old. Sometimes he knew that he was old. But, so long as this nervous energy stood at the centre of his being, imperious, insistent, arrogant, prepared to fling aside any dictates of wisdom or necessity, responsive to the lure of any sudden chance or opportunity, aware of duty and the mind's fierce pride, he could not age.

The eternal pattern—the kites' incessant keening—on which the Calcutta noon and afternoon embossed the passing voices of the modern world was the crying out of the regions of the upper air. During the war, and since it, Alden had come to equate with the metropolis other sounds also, which as yet troubled his Vishnugram hardly at all. The rattle and clank of trams, the approach and dying away of cars—these were noises that clung to the lower earth and were smoke while the other was flame. He remembered a time when motors were hardly known

in Calcutta streets. Now at whiles, especially when night was ravaged, he could have thought the whole creation was groaning together, waiting for the manifestation of—what? Some higher mechanisation, that would lift mankind out of physical weariness and all disease, but certainly out of its quick senses of light and colour and touch and sound? He was glad of these noises now, however. They made sure that knowledge of escape and change, in which he could rest, certain of no invasion of his hard-won ease. He was not in his office at Vishnugram.

In the evening he drifted (to use a favourite word of his) over the Maidan. He was aware in a moment of the obscure and detached fashion of his life. It had been set apart in a land where the tides of human existence seem, for all their foam, immaterial and illusory beyond their lot elsewhere. He was a ghost walking this path in time. No (for a ghost implies a vanished reality). A shadow, perhaps; for that is chained to substance, and there were times when for all his courage his spirit failed under the burden of physical weakness. Yet shadow also implied more than he felt. He realised how closely the years had filed away the body with which he toiled. More, they had cut deeper; the habit of intense loneliness, the Englishman's destiny in India, had left the hidden self as spare and austere as the gaunt, dry being that walked this meadow. The Maidan, green even in

these May heats, like Eden vivified with mist before the useful trouble of the rain, drew the mind far back into antiquity. Hugli, like the eternal stream Euphrates, crept by, a living thing. Night after night it arose to visit its banks and breathe upon the dust the day had slain. Its twilight exhalations—already (as the sun gathered his straying tyrannies to a heart of whiteness), a tenuous wisp in the air—had a being as real as the life of men and women that had vanished with the day. Alden looked at the Fort, which had first made a footing for the solid modern world on these sliding mud-flats. It had confronted an age long forgotten. The reed-copses and white tufts of feather-grass, the sunken drainage channels, witnessed to a time when the Maidan was a swamp severing the Fort from the houses of John Company's merchant servants. His countrymen had lived in so many points of isolation, with an unknown civilisation surging up against them. He thought of the River when this time of day, that saw him wandering beside it, had carried the budgerows<sup>1</sup> of that earlier age. The pageant of an alien splendour, aloof and arrogant, as certain as ever Rome or Ninevah had been that it was established for ever, had passed over this land. He had witnessed it in its last days of power, already threatened, but by an opposition so feeble as to be almost absurd. When he had first come

<sup>1</sup> Pleasure-boats.

to India, the students still kept the Day of the Bengal Partition as one of mourning, and attended classes barefoot. How frailly their protest broke against the granite of the Raj! If he, Alden, during exposition of Milton or Wordsworth animadverted on customs around him or the life of India of his own time, no word of defence or dissent came from his class, but an unauthorised paper might appear on a College board, pouring on 'the white-skinned gods of this institution' all the rabid hate of conscious impotence. He was ashamed to remember how often he had stung to the quick, with the best intentions in the world, with all the unconscious effrontery of priggish rectitude—children (his students were nothing more) who had no reply. He remembered the first time he had encountered that anonymous yelp. Another student, looking over his shoulder, had tried to curry favour. 'It is an insultation, sir! Steps must be taken.' But no steps were possible. Besides, Alden had gone off to do some thinking, and had started out with the fact that the protest had had to be anonymous. Douglas, though fair-minded and by his lights just, had a short way with 'sedition.'

Now those days had vanished so utterly that it was only by a hard effort of memory that he could see them as having ever been real. The boot was on the other leg. Education was on sufferance, an imperious and reckless Nationalism ruled the stage, jerking

his students back and forth like puppets. He was aware of the folly he was helping to run, the waste of time that passed for instruction. But he was determined to see the thing through. It had grown absorbingly interesting.

The Sun-God, himself come to knowledge of tiredness, checked his chariot and decided to stand. For a good twenty minutes there came no change upon the world. The light fell in broad, clear patches through the trees, it flung over the open spaces a warmth no longer overpowering. This does not mean that it was not excessive, by the standard of Northern summers. Alden might have thought that no further moisture could be wrung from his limbs. Nevertheless, though he moved with a listlessness that was almost luxuriant, his skin was soaked with every step.

A Eurasian boy with great ringing of his bell cycled past furiously, as boys will. A coolie, walking towards him, was startled out of heedlessness and ran in desperately from the edge of the wide fringe of trees. He and the boy escaped each other by a miracle. Alden was annoyed with the boy, who had made him also jump, with that sudden shrilling at his side. And his next reaction, too, was all an Englishman's. He called the coolie an idiot.

'Thine eyes are—where?' he asked.

The man's eyes might be said to be still abroad.

It is always worth while seizing the chance, too

rarely come by, to impart the great eternal truths. Alden did so now. He gave instruction, clear, rigid, simple, as to the wisdom of keeping your own path, and leaving the swifter body the power of changing course at the last moment, if change is desirable.

'I saw Fear,' said the man.

Fronted by the brute apprehensiveness in his eyes, the Englishman fell away from Alden, he became again the lonely mind walking in vanished days. He saw the almost incredible frailty and emaciation of the form he had been badgering. The man had seen Fear and Hunger and Cold and Heat; he had starved and toiled, had run from terror; he had been born, had begotten, and would perish. A woman had used him biologically, and had left him a brittle stalk that the summer's pitiless heats have sucked out into leaf and seed. A stale smell of old age clung about him. The body, with so little of flesh to clog it, would burn and blanch to dust swiftly. He had lived with facts so crudely rigorous that they had personalised themselves, had come upon him as they come upon the beasts that man bends to his service. Alden had seen these facts at leisure and before they were upon him, he had mitigated them, had evaded them, or endured them as trivial since temporary.

On the sunlight came a shadow and failing of its brightness. From Englishman and Indian also something of reality was filched. That brown wisp of body

seemed a fan of dust swept up by a ground-breeze. It was flapping aimlessly, though it had a face and voice. The wind would cease presently, and it would fall and be one with the other dust.

'Nothing comes or goes,' said Alden, using the formula which signifies that the whole matter is of no import whatever. 'Go in peace, Brother.'

He was to reach Vishnugram at something before three-thirty next morning, so had secured a lower berth on the night train. As always, he remained awake, ticking off the stations at their long intervals. He wondered about Harindra, not too much or too deeply. Not for one moment did he expect that he would ever learn who had disfigured the boy, or why it had been done. He had seen too many events emerge with just such suddenness from the flat monotony of this Indian existence, only to sink back unexplained. It was like this dry, wrinkled landscape on which he gazed through the carriage window. He knew its features by heart—crumblings away in the red earth serving for roads into the jungle; deep fissures that must be recent since they exposed the black snaky roots of the palas-trees that fringed them; saucers that held rain for five months and were shaded over by one of these datepalms whose fruit was so worthless. And suddenly one tree would stand out distinct, because of a star caught in its crest or the waving of the sheet-lightning that

was dancing all night. But the lightning was blotted out; the tree was absorbed into the earth and sky; the train had rumbled past.

## IX

IT WAS STILL DARK WHEN HE REACHED VISHNUGRAM, took over his cycle from a sleepy servant and, without the formality of lighting the lamp, mounted it. Dawn was beginning as he entered the College compound. A greener light than their own was filtering through the trees. A gold that was arctic in suggestion of chilliness—a suggestion to which every vein in the dried, constricted body responded, crying out that this was the gift for which it yearned—was seaming and rifting the grey. There was rustling in the bushes and in what the sun had left of the winter grass. A long thin snake looped across the path. And Alden, moving swiftly and silently, was aware of a circle seated round a fire under the huge banyan that was the pride of the College. The tree had a place in legend, with a ‘Lakshmi’ of its own, a woodland lady whose home was in its mighty corrugations. When Brahmoism was a living faith, its first Vishnugram adherents had worshipped here. ‘The groves were man’s first temples.’ The figures ghostly in the half-light, the mysterious stirrings in a world as yet but heaving in slumber, the

flicker dim-caught through the pillars, awakened old and new superstitions, and fallaciously rapt him into forgetfulness of mortality. Light-limbed and unsleeping, and with a soft wind of which men were unaware touching him to unseasonable vigour, he had come upon

‘Fear and trembling Hope,  
Silence and Foresight; Death the Skeleton,  
And Time the Shadow’,

in their silvan home and shrine! It was his misfortune that he often acted with his consciousness but half aglimmer, the subconscious mind commanding. Because he knew that these figures were up to no good, he forced his bike up an easy place in the bank. Because he was in an exultant dream, he did not pause while himself still unperceived, but spun into their midst. One of them was prodding the fire with a long bamboo. Satan leapt up at Alden’s side, prompting him, eager for his ruin. Alden gripped the fire-prodder by the shoulder, saying—for no reason in the world, except that the words rose unbidden and overleapt ‘the fence of his teeth’—‘Jatin shall be Prometheus. Prometheus was firegod of Greek.’

The effect was instantaneous. ‘Jatin’ with one eel-like squirm effected his escape. Alden saw he was alone, but imagined he glimpsed figures racing away

behind the many-pillared tree. A minute later, as he was cycling again towards his house, a jagged stone flew out of a mango-copse and gashed his forehead. He was raging, but knew already that he could do nothing, that he would be lucky if he could pass the episode over as forgotten and if those figures under the banyan would consent to have it so.

In the moment of his eruption upon the group he had known that he was a fool. This opinion received valuable outside confirmation, two days later, when the 'bearing' section of his mail brought a letter addressed to the 'Rev. Robert Alden B. F.' Inside was a sheet blank except for repetition of this inscription. The 'B.F.' was underlined, thrice. The post-mark was Ranibund, which Alden knew was the nearest post-office to the jungle residence of the Sadhu. Alden did not grudge the two annas which the public service mulcted him. He recognised that a disinterested judgment was worth paying for, even if it merely duplicated your own.

## X

ALDEN'S MIND WAS NOW ON FINDLAY. HIS WIFE AND child gone from the intolerable finish of May and the cruelty to follow before the Rains broke, a large part of his troubles were lifted. College and collegiate school were closed, the whole world was sunk in

somnolence. Even the President of the Independant Students' Asocciation had ceased from his unselfish labours. But somewhere, Alden knew, in that desolation which swept up to the edges of the Orissan wilderness the man whom of all men alive he loved was spending days and nights that contained little mercy to himself.

He would have left College and bungalow to their emptiness and have joined his friend, but for one thing. This was the Knight Hostel outrage. He was not bothering about its perpetrators; he never expected them to be tracked down. But the boy was wretched in deeper fashion than physical. He was lying in the public hospital, sufficiently cared for but with very much less than what Western lands would consider comfort. As night drew on, terror would spring up, and he would cry out with apprehension. He might attain to uneasy dozing. Then, as dawn approached, he would wake in uncontrollable horror. With Alden by, he would fall asleep quietly, assured that 'the murderers' (as everyone styled them) would not venture past that guard. Alden had to have a bed moved down to an adjoining room; he slept here, so far as he did sleep, and then cycled to the College to do the day's chores.

After a fortnight of this, the boy had recovered enough to be moved. He was a widow's son, one of the College's many poverty-stricken students. There

seemed no one to do anything for him. However, one morning his mother arrived in a bullock cart, from a village some thirty miles away. She had previously sent kinsfolk, an uncle and a cousin. Now she overcame her dread of strange men and strange regions sufficiently to take the journey herself. She remained heavily veiled throughout, but the Englishman saw how deep was her sorrow and distress—how deep, too, her gratitude to him.

The figure on the stretcher interpreted. Alden caught the words with difficulty, as they choked in the shattered channels of speech.

'She says you are my giver-of-life. I say so also.'

The boy was a gentle, harmless boy. As he looked on his disfigured face, screwed up and twisted into unsightliness, Alden's eyes blurred with pity and anger. It was a rotten thing that man should have it in his power to inflict so swiftly irrevocable wrong—that he should have done it all down the ages, so unmercifully and unimaginatively, and should still do it. Henley's line, 'Life is, I think, a blunder and a shame,' was constantly in Robin's thought. Why had the martyrdom of man ever been allowed to begin? Why had one brute been allowed to emerge out of the innocent ruthlessness of the rest of creation, into such freedom of deliberate cruelty and such repeated folly, in every land—the vilest creature on the planet?

*XI*

HE WAS NOW ABLE TO CATCH THE NIGHT TRAIN TO Suryakonda, where he would get down at one in the morning, and cycle through twenty-two miles of jungle to Kanthala. Kanthala lay only a little over thirty miles away from Vishnugram, on a direct route; it had been a toss-up in his mind whether to cut the dragging, uncomfortable train journey out altogether, and to bike the whole way. That matter of an extra nine miles just turned the scale. The nights were breathless, and he felt how close to the limits of human endurance he was living. He had continued to act as if he were still a young man, and as if there had not been twenty years of unsparing physical and mental effort in all weathers. He knew now that he was acting on a fiction.

As he cycled through the night—slowly, for the air was windless and his body listless and lethargic to a point not far above loss of consciousness—he found that on these forest ways one still had to play the good old game of dodging the timber-yard. This was Findlay's nickname for a sport not yet recognised in any athletic code, but thrilling beyond most. The jungle 'road' was only tolerable; the red soil often crumbled into pits or fissured steeply. Bumps and an occasional spill you took (so to speak) in your stride. Bullock-carts that carried a load of spindly sals, tree-

lengths trailing uncertainly behind for many yards, were a harder matter. Their drivers were invariably asleep. Not so their beasts. These would start as you came upon them, fix you with one momentary stare into which was concentrated all the terror and amazement of which the ox-mind is capable; then plunge off at right angles to the path, seeking the bush. You necessarily left the path also, hoping to slip through while a gap remained before impenetrable jungle held you. It was a point of honour all these years, both with Alden and Findlay, not to dismount unless a hidden nullah flung you off. By emergency endowed with more senses than belong to normal man, you dashed wildly over rut and hummock and thorn. With those rocking timbers all but closing in to sweep you to the ground, you slid past somehow. For danger, and the skill and speed escape required, it was a recreation compared with which the medieval quintain was clumsy and dull.

It was the drowsy season, and lumbering was slack. Alden had met only one cart in six miles, when his second brought him to grief. This was because the road did a brief switchback, into a dry brook and out of it again. The sudden rise made him loom up as if out of the very earth itself, almost between the horns of a terrified bullock. The beast and its companion swung round with such celerity that Alden had no chance. He made a game attempt, but a

loose outlier, longer than the other sals, struck his funny-bone an agonising blow and sent him spinning. The bullocks, they and their load completely blocking the way, waited stock still, panting; one had been flung to earth and was pinned there by its yoke. Alden (illogically, as he saw afterwards) was annoyed. In any case, he must clear the cart out of his way, to proceed. The driver, his head swathed against mosquitoes, was lying drugged with more than sleep, having clearly fortified himself against the long trip through a jungle where a few leopards still lurked, by more than the garlic which was poisoning the night air. Alden shouted in his ear, then shook him, eliciting only a senscless 'Huzoor' ('Presence!'), the sleepy mind's recognition that it was an authoritative voice that was vexing its dreams.

The Indian night is an obliterator of nice distinctions, particularly of ethical ones. But, indeed, the action that now pressed itself forward as desirable took on an eminently ethical guise. It seemed to Alden that not justice only, kindness itself, required that such somnolence should not pass undisciplined and that the punishment should fit the crime. He uplifted the kneeling bullock with his own hands, and then, gently, tenderly, he led the pair round to the road again, and set them on their way—in the direction from which they had come. He chuckled,

to think of the driver's bewilderment when he rubbed his eyes, some hours hence, to find that he was not at his destination but near his starting-point. The bullocks, faithful beasts, would hold that steady two-miles-an-hour pad till they were stopped. What fishy tale would he present to his employers, the Samodar Railway Sleeper Supply Company Limited? Alden knew the Portuguese half-caste in charge at Suryakonda station —de Souza, lazy, generous, irascible. There was no danger of the sack, especially with labour as scarce as it was. But there would undoubtedly be a tempestuous whirl of words to receive the errant driver. Alden would drop in on de Souza later, and get at the legend, of what wild elves and jungle *bhuts* had swept this honest one astray from his task. As he pushed his bike ahead to where he could mount without alarming the cattle again, he glanced at the driver, slumbering there unconscious of what day was to bring.

‘Oh, how oft shall he  
On faith and changèd gods complain, and seas  
Rough with black winds and storms  
Unwonted shall admire!’

## XII

DAWN WAS WELL UNDER WEIGH WHEN ALDEN ENTERED the Kanthala compound. He wondered whether he

should find Findlay at home. He had no expectations either way.

He did not find him. John was without retainers or service of any sort, except that out of the miscellaneous human world about him, a large part of which was supported by his salary, meals would materialise, in which he shared if hunger demanded it. This miscellaneous human world now occupied rooms and verandas; much of it, as Alden knew, was lame and halt and diseased. He had himself persuaded John to draw the line at lepers, solely because their sores stained rugs and blankets that others might (rather, with certainty would) use after them. For lepers a row of outhouses had been evacuated. He had insisted, too, that John's own room be sacrosanct; this, at least, the Mission had a right to make him reserve, for its own sake as well as his. John had kept one frailty voluntarily, his study with its bookshelves. Drawing this study and the adjoining bedroom blank, Robin proceeded to interrogate the drowsy population outside.

No, the saheb was not here. He often wandered at night, especially if there were any sort of moon. He talked with *devatas* (deities) of the woods. This unorthodox legend a Christian corrected; it was *dutts* (angels) that, as was well known, accompanied with the saheb in his nocturnal vigils. He had been seen, far in some pit-black forest hollow, talking with

forms above mortal stature. No *bhuts* would molest him; the *bhuts* dreaded him, for the saint they knew him.

None could tell where Findlay might be now. But Alden thought he could guess. He wheeled his bike into John's study, locked it lest lawless hands tamper with it, and then struck out for the 'Eyes of the Forest.' Those twin lakes had just caught the sun rising on the wilderness, and flashed upward as if they were indeed the face of the land, a face intelligible and seeking human companionship. As if a load of mortality sloughed from him, from Alden rolled away the teasing follies of his existence; though the body was worn out, even that was renewed, in the unconquerable eagerness that slipped from its sheath. The brain had been aching with effort, tense with watchfulness and sense of loneliness against odds and uncertainty, sure only of one thing, that it could never let go. It became in a moment smoothed out and happy. He did not need to analyse his delight of release, as everything

'suddenly burst out singing.'

He knew, without bothering to know, that it was because he had found that he still held in his hands the key of that region where his friend lived, because he was about to walk right out of the conventions that Findlay had forsaken but he must still bound his

days by, into the freedom where there was nothing but trustfulness, fearlessness, and a reckless scorn of what time might do to the body. In that hour he could have left the world, to abide here until death came.

From the high bank severing the lakes he saw, to southward, white arms uplifted and a flash of shattering water. John was standing erect, beyond the reedy margent, where the Eye deepened out of swamp into lake; he was tossing the water up, up, in sweeping armfuls that fell around him. Robin made a trumpet of his palms.

'John!' he shouted gleefully. 'John!'

In that wilderness air, unclogged by noise, unjaded by human traffic, voices travelled almost with the swift and radiant freshness of the light now speeding abroad.

'Hallo, Rob!'

'Half a sec! I'm with you, O Child of Rechab!'

The observer from afar might excusably have supposed Alden a four-handed denizen of these unchristian wastes, for it was by what seemed simultaneous action that boots, socks, shirt, and shorts were torn from the body and flung aside. He took a header where deep water ran up to the embankment side, Findlay swimming to meet him. From a long, shooting thrust under water all the way Robin emerged to find John awaiting him, an arm's length off. Both

turned over, and floated, kicking up huge silver fountains.

When they went to the bungalow presently, Robin foraged, and routed out stores of sorts. They concocted breakfast together. Seeing no ripe fruit on John's bel-trees, Robin raided the cook's godown, finding several bels, out of which he ordered sherbet to be made, for later in the morning. Then he announced the day's programme.

'You're going to take what Charles Lamb prescribes, a moral holiday, Jackadab my boy. I'm not going to fag out all these miles, to have the Aryan Brother coughing five feet away all day long, and alleging that he wants to see you—or even see *me*, perchance! I've been interviewing folk for thirty-five hours in the twenty-four, for months past. And as for you, I know that your life is one long interview.'

John demurred. He began, 'I've a deputation coming from Kalibund this morning. And then—'

'They can *thak*' (remain) 'here, with the other thakers. I know, I know. You and I love all and everything in this great lovable world. The jungle folk have their simple, attractive points, and their betters are a spiritual and learned clan, who were civilised—just as much as they are to-day, perhaps more so—see Chapter Three, *any* chapter, of the Gospel according to St. Gandhi—ages before our

ancestors had even learnt to wrap their uncomely persons in skins. There is nothing I like better than a chat about *koshto*<sup>1</sup> and the seemliness of the wealthy—meaning thereby you and me!—assisting the deserving poor. It is beautiful when saheb and junglywalla come together in this pleasing and friendly fashion. Nevertheless—

“He who of these delights can judge, and spare  
To interpose them oft, is not unwise”.

His light-heartedness continued, as he dragged the unprotesting Findlay into the wood. But did not interfere with the purpose of his visit, which was to persuade his friend into some accommodation with necessity. He did not exaggerate the risks of Findlay's life; he knew that luck besets all mortal roads, and that the man who walks unheeding often survives unscathed while the careful dies from causes trivial in the extreme. But he was aware unceasingly of the merciless tyranny with which Brother Ass was driven. Prove to Findlay that anything was a luxury whose absence would release a penny for others' needs, and it went immediately. Suggest that rest was an essential; he looked at you uncomprehending. He had taken no respite from his work since that summer when his wife and child had died. There was no need for a famine to come, declared officially

<sup>1</sup> Trouble of any sort—a catholic and inclusive term.

as such by Government; in this land there was always famine somewhere. There was always disease and suffering. Findlay had wandered like a ghost, inexplicably getting word and finding his way to obscure wretchedness everywhere. If he had been out all this last night, Alden knew it was because he had been to some hut too far away to be reached in these intolerable heats. Alden, walking beside him, saw that rigour had knit the body to a tension that must snap suddenly and soon. Even now, he moved magnificently, this man who, not ten years since, had been good enough for any county team, in either cricket or rugger. But he moved as unbodied will might move. You were conscious of Mind the Driver, inflexible, crushing down rebellion—

‘One stern tyrannic thought, which made  
All other thoughts its slave.’

Alden chose their resting-place. Not far within the jungle, where there had been once the garden of a tiny bungalow, long since ruined and sunk to grass-grown mounds, was a gold mohur tree. Eighty years earlier, Findlay’s own bungalow had belonged to an indigo-planter; here had been the house of some assistant or overseer. The mohur was one of several, that made a grove of dazzling splendour. Year by year, May in their flowers turned all its cruelty into loveliness, vast clouds and heads of flame. The forest

knew no such glory; this was the gift of man, surviving his vanished sojourn.

Findlay sat against the trunk, and Alden swung himself up on to a lateral branch and lay there full length, looking down.

'What have you gone up there for, Rob? You can't be very comfy?'

'That's all you know. I'm tired of sitting chair-fashion. Bradley told me how one day in Mandalay he met a chap hanging by his hands from the bar of a lamp-post. The fellow was a postman, and explained he used to get frightfully footsore, and that was his way of resting. I thought it a yarn at the time. But now I know that the old Greek was right when he said that change was the sweetest thing of all to mortals.'

Alden fished out of his pockets a couple of cheroots, of a kind first made in Trichinopoli fifty years ago, of incredible strength and cheapness, to suit a missionary whose name survives attached to his fancy. They are much esteemed by hide-dressers, butchers, and other low-class Mohammedans. He threw one down to Findlay, who refused it.

Followed a silent space in which the body withdrew from the mind's imperiousness, lying down as peacefully as ever a beast turned loose from yoke in pasturage. Alden, among the tree's vivid green that was ocellated and lit with blossoms as if it were a

huge panther-skin canopying them, knew why he had chosen that posture. His limbs were stretched luxuriously, his eyes were restful, everything was annihilated to a green thought in a green shade. The very fragrance of the mohur leaves, so free from all sweetness or from the merely aromatic, the scent of viridity and the emerald blood of rankness, was cleansing. Yet presently the discomfort of smoke flying into his face sent him down, and he took up a position against the back of another tree confronting John. He began to feel he could talk. His first words were a comment on the picture made by his friend's brown arms, their sleeves tucked up to the elbow, their knotted muscles foiled by the gnarled trunk and boughs.

'I've always thought you were as sheer whipcord as any man I ever saw. What ever wasted you on these wilds? You should have been a prizefighter, the East End's Pet. And with that face of a converted pirate topping all—visions of Heaven *and* of the Spanish Main swimming somewhere in great lagoons back of your eyes! The ladies would have been wild about you. What a shame!

' "And, O James", she said. "My James!"  
she said.

"Alas for the woeful thing!  
That a poet true and a friend of man,  
In desperate days of bale and ban,  
Must needs be born a king!"'

'I want to hear what's been happening at Vishnugram,' said Findlay.

'And so thou shalt, O Jackadab.'

The Old Testament tells of a Prince of Good Templars, one Jonadab the Son of Rechab. By easy process, John Findlay had passed via Jonadab to Jackadab.

Alden outlined recent events.

'We'd better see the Sadhu', said Findlay.

'Do you reckon he knows who cut my boy up?'

'He may. He seems to know most things. It's queer,' said Findlay to himself, 'knowing everything, and doing nothing.'

'I'm not so sure as I was, that he *does* nothing. What he *knows* is uncanny. He can't have learnt it all without having a finger in an occasional pie.'

'I think he can. I've learnt things I would never have dreamed possible, since I began to live this way. Once you've finished worrying about what happens in the world, every voice in the world seems to drift up to you. I listen to nothing now, but I seem to hear everything. I've begun to think the intellect is Satan himself. It's the worst of all possible nuisances and misleaders, anyway. I'm glad I no longer have any.'

'Yes', Robin agreed. 'Clever men are as common as blackberries. In every class of every school and college and varsity in every land there's someone absolutely outstanding. And that happens

every year. But not one in a thousand amounts to anything.'

'And that's true, too. But it isn't what I meant.'

In the strange fashion whereby mind gropes its way to mind, without any speech, both had grown gradually aware of a restlessness not yet above the surface of consciousness but troubling that surface only a little below it. It lifted the waves, if it did not break them. Findlay discovered its cause. Watching them, superbly imaged against one of this tiny park of flaming beauty, was a young Indian. Young, since his body had cast off marks of age, but mature in his golden, chiselled fitness.

'Hallo, Nilkamal!' said Findlay, in Bengali. 'Has the Sadhu changed thee into a tree-spirit, that thou standest there so silent, watching us, thyself unseen? I did not hear thee come.'

To Robin he added, in an aside, 'I'd forgotten. I've something to tell you about this chap afterwards.'

Nilkamal, without coming forward, addressed himself to John. 'I have sought thee. I desired to speak face to face with the United English Nation.'

'That is what a great many folk seem to be desiring,' said Alden. 'I'm blest if I know where this United English Nation hangs out. All I do know is, complaints against it seem to get to *my* address, though I've precious little say in the things that cause them.'

'I am not the United English Nation,' said Findlay.

This evasion Nilkamal rebutted with his favourite aphorism. 'The voice of one is the voice of all,' he pointed out. 'You are not like us, who speak with many voices. You speak all as one.'

'That,' said Alden, 'is one of the heathen's little delusions.'

'Are not thy food and clothing delivered regularly?' asked Findlay.

'They are. But it is not of these that I am thinking.' There was perplexity in his eyes. 'Saheb, the soul of this land is troubled. Does not the United English Nation know?'

'It knows, right enough,' said Alden.

'There are voices everywhere speaking like men in a dream. I would be free, serving God and without desire for the fruit of action. But this breaks up my meditation.'

'It breaks up ours also,' Findlay assured him.

'I have written two letters. One was to the Government of India, and the other was to the United English Nation, care of the Government of India. Both were sent bearing. I have written yet a third,' he added, 'to the United English Nation, care of thee.'

'And that's a fact,' said Findlay in an aside to Alden. 'I haven't answered it yet. The truth is, it wasn't easy to answer.'

As if reading his thought, and acquitting him, Nilkamal said, 'I know that thou wilt answer. But

I have received replies to neither of my former letters.'

'What did the letters contain?' asked Alden.

Nilkamal paused, puzzled. Then he said, weakly, 'They contained certain cosmic suggestions relating to a world alliance.'

'I'll dare bet they were comic, as well as cosmic,' Alden assured himself.

'And what were these cosmic suggestions?' asked the astonished Findlay.

Nilkamal looked blankly round the grove. 'I cannot recall them now.'

Nor could his interlocutors afterwards recall the details of the long rambling bilingual conversation that followed. Findlay remembered again the mystery and unexpectedness of that first interview, when Nilkamal had told him that he had eaten nothing for three days, but had pushed back the offered rupee, asking 'What is this for?' And Findlay had said, 'To buy food in the bazaar', and had received the reply, 'I only live on plums', i.e. on the berries of the wild zizyph-bush. The present talk was equally inconsecutive, memorable chiefly for the distress that flitted in and out of Nilkamal's eyes. It took up the time until Alden, who before coming out had issued orders for that unusual experience, a proper lunch, to be prepared for Findlay, signified that he was taking John back.

Suddenly Nilkamal's face flashed into a golden smile of happiness. He salaamed, and 'took the dust' of Findlay's feet.

'Saheb, I have spoken with the United English Nation. I know that justice will be done.'

He leant forward, and gathered a low bough that was one massy head of colour. He plunged his face into its depths. 'It is very sweet,' he said in English. 'Sadhu saheb, this grove is very good.' He went, as silently as he had come.

Arrived at the bungalow, John rummaged in his desk. 'Here!' he said, tossing a letter to Robin. 'What do you make of that?'

Above the address ('The United English Nation c/o Mr. Findlay, Kanthalala') were the words 'Special and sacred.' The letter itself was headed, as were most of the examination papers handed in by Robin's College students, 'May God help me!' The letter was as follows:

'To the United English Nation (=humanity)  
I. Though it will not go to add to the lustre of British glory I distinctly commend my little family to the humanity. Verily verily long to see in a day or two by and before Sunday how justice is done to them. Heaven thy will be done. I was in the bosom of my family before and am now and for evermore wish to see my family mine.'

II. Then I wish to be free and easy in my little roving world in manners watched stealthily living by the whole world.

III. Then I lift up my hands for fruits first last.  
Nilkamal Ghosh.'

'I don't wonder that the Indian Government isn't answering, if it is getting letters like this,' said Robin. 'Obviously the poor lad's brain has given way again.'

'Yes. But the interesting thing to me is, it's a lunacy that has been *caught*.'

'Who's he caught it from?'

Findlay sighed. 'Robin, do you think a whole people can go mad together at one time?'

'Do I think it? I know it. There are the Americans dead sure they have all the democracy and idealism that are going—except a little bit that's somehow got wafted across to Ramsay MacDonald. *We* have all the common sense and all the justice and fair play, the French have bagged all the wit and *esprit* and artistic sense, the Germans have all the *kultur* and capacity for hard work and to face brutal facts without any frills on, and the Indians have made a corner in spirituality and real high nobility of mind. Why, the whole world has been mad for a good dozen years at least, to my certain knowledge.'

'Yes. And that doesn't matter.'

'You mean—these folk here have been getting their

brains fuzzed up with a special excitement? They've all gone doctrinaire?"

'Yes. Look at this document from dear, good Nilkamal. Why's *he* bothering about cosmic suggestions relating to a world alliance, when all he needed was a square meal of rice twice a day?'

'Which he wasn't getting till he ran across you. I know it, John. When what India needs is to keep her nose to facts, she's gone off into abstractions. We cut down the opium, and they get drunk on print. They'll be starting Women's Clubs next. When all the English rage was for Macaulayese, they bettered us at that. They're already beating us at this pseudo-psychology tosh that's running wild. And they've ransacked the universe for nice analogies with themselves. Point out to them that their Hindus and Mohammedans aren't agreeing, even while they're still in the stage of sheer fun, drawing up imaginary constitutions for an imaginary United Indian Nation. They'll reply by quoting from the Durham Report before Canada got self-government, to show that they can't possibly be in a worse mess than Canada was then, when French and British were ready to fly at each other. The thing that matters', Alden went on, cutting clean across logic in his swift, masterful stride towards fact, 'is not that they're *like* Canada on paper, but that they *are* going to cut one another's throats.'

*XIII*

ALDEN SAW TO IT THAT JOHN LAY DOWN FOR THE afternoon, and was glad enough to do the same himself. He broadcast blood-curdling threats of what would befall any disturber. They would have proved impossible of performance; the moment heads were put to pillow, sleep took possession like an anæsthetic. The sun was setting when they awakened.

Unfortunately, night was still to follow.

No words can convey the fact of an Indian night in late May—its utter breathlessness and misery. Findlay would have gone abroad but for Alden's insistence that work must be laid by. The whole of their world was enjoying a moratorium—why should one man alone pay the debt of labour, at the time when it mattered to no one whether labour went undone or not? They lay awake talking, and sleep came only when dawn was near. It was broken quickly, by one of Findlay's pensioners bringing tea. Afterwards Findlay and Alden, while the day was still in its stage of promise, with grim fulfilment ahead, set out for Jayananda's *asram*.

As they neared their goal, Findlay said, 'He will be expecting us.'

'I suppose he will. You never take him by surprise.'

'We couldn't expect to. You take the place of Society with a big S, with us. If the bazaar had gossip

writers, it would be "A little bird told me yesterday that Principal Alden, of the Vishnugram Christian College, had been seen alighting at 1 a.m. from the train at Suryakonda. Mr. Alden, better known as the Long-armed Saheb, is on a visit to his old friend, Mr. Findlay, better known as the Crazy Saheb." They've nothing else to talk of. You eclipse, when you appear, even the *bhut* that a small boy alleges accosted him when he was bringing home the family sweetmeats.'

'Tell me about the *bhut*. *Bhuts* are always jolly, and often interesting.'

'It is the *bhut* of an old washerman who was eaten by a leopard last March, and therefore partially and most inadequately burnt, most of him having been devoured. He has haunted Ranibund ever since. The boy was bringing home the family goodies, when the *bhut* leant forward and downward in the guise of a tree-branch, groaning fearsomely. That was why the boy turned up sweetmeatless, well after dusk. The boy is a bad boy, and had delayed to play with companions, to get his spirits back—'

'I should think spirits were the last thing he wanted back!'

'Don't be flippant, old companion! His spirits back after his dreadful adventure. The tale hangs together, and in the good old days would have passed without question.'

'And hasn't it?'

'No. I regret to say that we have a modernist school growing up even in our wilds. Our local Bishop Barnes, the *mahant* in charge of the Ranibund temple, who is also the boy's uncle, and had provided the cash for the sweetmeats which the *bhut* pinched, has beaten the boy as a thief. He inspected his mouth, and found traces (he says) of molasses all round the rim. Thereupon the true believers, headed by another Brahmin who claims that the mahantship belongs to him of right, have risen in protest and are withholding their offerings to the temple. It has made quite a schism.'

Alden was Findlay's only link with the world he had forsaken. No one else could have drawn him back into the pleasant cynicism which, more than anything else, keeps the Englishman in India free from the kindred insanities of self-righteous seriousness and ungenerous bitterness. John was smiling with all the old eager humorous kindness.

'Besides,' he added, 'Nilkamal saw us yesterday. Of course he has told the Sadhu, who will put two and two together, and then another two, and make six. He knows all about your boy being chopped up, he knows you'll want to know exactly how far he'll let you into the secret of how much an ass you've been, he knows Nilkamal (even if it wasn't on our programme before) will send us out to see him.'

'We've nothing to touch your *bhut* yarn,' said Alden.

'Never mind. Tell me what you have.'

'Well, of course there's the usual boundless crop of political rumours—of how Gandhi has been again sent to prison, but miraculously broke out and flashed into a meeting being held a thousand miles away: of how the Viceroy has been slain, and Calcutta captured by a successful Nationalist Rising: of how aeroplanes manned by the Nehrus have laid London in ashes, sparing the Houses of Parliament on the abject surrender of the Lords and Commons there assembled to wail over this latest news from the Front.'

'And you say you have nothing to tell me!'

'It's something, perhaps,' Alden conceded. 'But not up to standard. In the hot weather the supply of legend fails somewhat.'

Presently Findlay said, 'We're just about there. Blest if I can always be sure of the turn that takes us to his pet particular banyan!'

As Findlay had surmised, they were expected. The Sadhu had spaces cleared of scrub and thorn, with cloths spread. His guests had been seen for certainly the last two miles of their journey. Nilkamal brought in parched rice, sweetmeats, and water.

Lying on one arm, beside the Sadhu, was a young Indian. His face had the look, a compound of conceit, enthusiasm, insolence, and uncertainty, which Alden knew so well. The enthusiasm gave it attract-

iveness; at times there came into his eyes a lofty flame of selfless vision that composed its flaws and gave it peace. It did not come now, however. He ignored the Englishmen's greetings, and would have refused to touch the food set before them all.

But this their host would not pass. 'Since when have you begun to bother about caste, Chandrasekhar? To my knowledge, you have been living with Musalmans during the past fortnight.'

The young man's defiance died down in face of the Sadhu. The latter, once sure that his guests were not going to be despised in his presence, made a gesture of peace.

'Dinabandhu Tarkachuramani,' he said courteously, 'is one of the few who have not merely talked about Indian unity, but have made the sacrifices it requires. A Pal, he has mixed freely with leather-sellers; a Hindu of the Hindus, descendant of kings, and resident in a region where they still think onions are flesh, and Musalmans and Europeans are demons, he has joined with followers of the Prophet. I am not going to encourage him in any reversion to type.'

The young man smiled, disdainfully, but with genuine pleasure. Alden was excited; Findlay, who was never excited, noted what he missed, the subtle changes in the Sadhu's manner. Chandrasekhar Pal had thrown aside his own name for the style that

glorified his services to Nationalism, Dinabandhu Tarkachuramani, 'Friend-of-the-Needy Gem-on-Controversy's-Crest'. By withholding this for the name of his unregenerate days, and linking that with a stab about caste, the Sadhu had reminded him of an old plane of thought that he now despised as childish. On his compliance with the courtesy exacted from him, his new name, the name by which all India knew him, was restored to him.

Alden thought only, 'So *this* is Dinabandhu Tarkachuramani! The man who by rights should be ruling Vishnugram, who claims descent from a Raja who was king when St. Augustine was seeking to convert Kent! Whose blood runs back to ancient Chitor, so he asserts and the land believes, and to the Sun-God himself! Who has made the gesture of laying aside his pride of race and creed, to link all India against us!'

It was Dinabandhu Tarkachuramani who had tried to make a party in the National Congress to adopt the immediate abolition of all caste severances in eating, and inter-marriage between Hindus and Mohammedans. It was a crazed gesture; but then his whole life consisted of such. Full independence had become his religion; there was no thought that flashed through his brain that was not turned towards it. He was out of patience with Gandhi's methods and with all who played with the notion

of Dominion status. He would have India very India, one and indivisible and sovereign, no matter what blood it cost. Since the titular Raja of Vishnugram had died, two years since, he had become heir to the highest place in the imagination of all this tract of country. But his position in the thought of India outside Bengal depended on less medieval qualities. It would be hard to overestimate his share in the pamphlets and reports that have eddied down in the unceasing gusts of political agitation during the past half-dozen years. It was he who found in all known quarters of the habitable world, but most of all in the self-governing Dominions, exact parallels that rebutted objections raised by opponents of Indian independence. It was he who flung the neatest sarcasms back at the latest speech in House of Commons or House of Lords. His polemics furnish exhilarating reading.

He knew the history of Ireland, the South African struggles, the American Revolution, inside out. His shillelagh always lay within tempting reach of his hand. That blunderer Alden now thrust up his incautious head.

'They are not worrying much about caste in Bengal,' he said. 'My boys never let me eat apart from them if we are on a football tour or famine relief, or anywhere except where their village folk can see them.'

'Ah!' said Dinabandhu in his silkiest tones. 'That is the uplifting influence of the Christian missionary—the Christ of the Indian Road. We are shedding all our debasing superstitions in presence of such an example. As Poet Tennyson has well observed,

"We needs must love the highest *when we see it*".'

'I can give you another quotation from Tennyson', replied Alden. 'It fits you people like a glove, especially since Miss Mayo so kindly told you all where you belonged.

"Thou thoughtest on thy prowess and thy sin".'

Alden's sally ended in a happy chuckle. The Sadhu, seeing the hot angry flush in Dinabandhu's cheeks, interposed swiftly. 'If Alden visits me much, this tree is going to become unfit for meditation. It lay untroubled between Buddha and Alden; and you are going to make it haunted with the ghosts of repartee and argument.'

The Indian's anger vanished in interest. As he looked up questioningly, the Sadhu continued, 'Gotama sent a monk to convert Jayananda, about 450 B.C., already the fifth of that name to live here. The monk failed, and (which vexed him more) failed even to ruffle the Sadhu's temper. Thereupon, it is related, he struck at him with his staff. But the blow was waved aside by the *devatas* of the tree, and

the staff was transfixated in the ground, where it became a red hibiscus, in every age offering its crimson sacrifice to the Goddess Kali.'

'This hibiscus,' said Alden, 'isn't a dozen years old.'

'No? But within the memory of man there has been a hibiscus here—this or another.'

'If you can make the peace with my corpse,' said Alden, 'do so, Sadhuji. Say something beastly about me. I shan't mind.'

'Accept his invitation,' said Findlay. 'He deserves it for his irresponsibility. He never lets a chance of scoring go by.'

'Let me point out, then, that this tree has been vexed by two men in the millenniums of its use by religious men. Both were missionaries.'

'And both,' said Alden cheerfully, 'offered you something you hadn't the sense to accept. It would have been a darned good thing if the United Indian Nation had followed the Buddha.'

'A darned good thing for you, you mean', said the Nationalist. 'You would be confronted now by a nation of monks and people habituated and addicted to the practice of non-violence.'

Alden leapt into the fray again. 'What good is violence going to do you?'

'What good did it do the Irish?'

'Ah! you think that's unanswerable!'

'We know it is. The English can be fought down with their own weapons of brutality and murder. They cannot be reasoned with.' He had flung out political India's most dangerous and tenaciously held belief.

'They were not fought down in Ireland. They were reasoned with—not by the Irish, but by themselves. To this day,' said Alden to himself, 'I can't bring myself to think of an Irishman as a foreigner, though I know I ought to. You are all so dead sure,' he went on, 'that history is going to repeat itself, aren't you? What history? Just the history you choose to look at? Why shouldn't the history of Mogul days be repeated—and not the history of Ireland at all? Supposing the Sikhs find a Cromwell, and decide that they aren't going to act according to your programme and police India and defend it, while you run the Cabinet jobs and the Administration?"

In his rage, Dinabandhu rose, and prepared to go. 'Some of you think,' Alden continued, infatuated, as was his wont, with his thesis, 'you can go on murdering isolated Englishmen for ever—and then staging wholesale agitation to have everyone accused set free. I remember back—so do you, Sadhuji—to the time of the Partition row, when someone was assassinated pretty well every week. And there are men who want those times to return! But I'm as

sure as I am that the sun will rise to-morrow, that there are two choices ahead of you folk. You can steer India into peaceful partnership with the rest of the Empire, or you can enter on the path which you think has always led to independence and glory before—that of assassination and guerrilla warfare.'

'Peaceful partnership!' The Nationalist passed beyond all control in his anger. 'Your condescension is your worst insolence of all!'

'You keep looking at Ireland. Why not look at China?'

'We do' shouted Dinabandhu. 'And we say, Better rivers of blood than a nation with its soul in chains!'

'I wonder if you ever consult the folk who are to contribute largely to these picturesque rivers of blood? You think of war still in terms of coloured prints where gallant knights and gay dragoons in busbies go charging into glorious battle. You have let the movement be captured by boys whose minds are in the popgun stage.'

Findlay was in utter distress. 'What earthly good do you think you are doing, Robin? And you are not playing the game by Jayananda.'

But suddenly Alden's whole figure stiffened and drew together, seeming to gather enormous length, as when a snake becomes a rod, to strike direct and swiftly. The man's excitement grew intense, an

excitement such as Findlay knew came only when he had forgotten (as he forgot too easily) the personal susceptibilities involved in argument, and saw nothing but facts which he was prepared to examine as if they were dead things.

'You dream and think of Ireland. Do so still. Only remember that in the end peace came by treaty, which gave neither side all it sought. The men who had fought imperialism with revolution, in signing that treaty signed their own lives away. If you let the thing go that far, you must buy its ending with lives. *Not*, as you bought its beginning, with the lives of others, but with your own. I wonder which of you has the magnanimity to become India's Michael Collins. Death at the hands of England seems a grand going out. You can dream and dream of it, and see yourselves the heroes of films you will never witness, novels you will never read, songs you will never hear. But for some of you it will be death at the hands of your own side.'

Alden's mind, tortuous, explosive, had burst into the argument from an unexpected quarter. The Indian started, as though a voice heard faintly in hallucination had grown intelligible and significant. He had ceased to listen to Alden, when Alden snapped the spell, and dragged him back to battle.

'Dinabandhu Babu! Why won't you folk admit

that no peaceful solution is possible unless both sides make sacrifices? And any other than a peaceful solution is too horrible to think of?

There was nothing in his manner but eagerness, excitement, friendliness. But the words were platitudinous and provoking. The Nationalist's reply came back, hard and savage.

'What sacrifices is England proposing to make?' he sneered. 'The giving up of booty is not sacrifice. It is a measure demanded by the police, when a thief is run to ground. And why,' he shouted angrily, 'is any other than a peaceful solution unthinkable? It is very thinkable to us. India has been subjugated by blood, she shall win freedom by blood. Do you think we are afraid of being shot down by your machine-guns?'

With hardly a gesture of farewell to the Sadhu, he left them.

The Sadhu sat on impassive. Alden was too appalled and ashamed to say anything. Findlay's mouth was twisted in a queer half-smile, half-grimace. It was he who first spoke.

'Sadhuji!'

Jayananda looked at him.

'What did Robin do wrong?'

'Tell him yourself, Findlay.'

'He jawed to Dinabandhu as if we were still in 1925, instead of 1929. Am I right? Sadhuji, you

explain what I mean. It'll carry more conviction from you, who are an Indian.'

'You talked as if Dinabandhu were a mild Hindu,' said Jayananda to Alden.

'I know he isn't mild,' Alden replied.

'Nor is he conspicuously Hindu. Don't you know that he doesn't care a rap for Hindu notions and Hindu prejudices? That he looks on Non-Violence as a private fad of Gandhi's, useful with the world outside, especially since America has persuaded herself into a pacifist mood and looks on Gandhi as a saint. But his own mood is much closer to that of the American Revolutionaries than to that of the American cold-weather visitors who crowd the side-seats at the Congress.'

'But how far does he count?' asked Alden.

'He counts a great deal—now.'

'I know nothing about him, except that he's that unusual thing, a member of a semi-princely house who has taken to argufying. Is he really important?'

The Sadhu hesitated. 'In himself, no. In fact, there's nothing respectable about him, apart from his passion for independence. But that of itself, as history shows in many lands, can sometimes make even a small man great. It makes Dinabandhu important now, while we're in the stage of platform squabbling. He should at least make you realise

that you have enemies who desire no peace, and who have no scruples about winning what they want by bloodshed.'

'He's a Bengali,' Alden persisted. 'A race of poets!'

'He's not a pukka Bengali. His folk are uplanders, and in origin half Rajput. And, even if he is a Bengali, can't he set on fire people who are not Bengalis?' (He might have added, 'Is there any people in India, for whom the idea of war has such an appeal?') 'What makes you think those old divisions have stood fast when everything else has been in flux? You English never learn that the age has moved until it is too late. Your diehards are still on the old chatter about Indian agitation being the work of a few half-baked clerks. They have never been told that it has drawn in merchants and business men who have traffic in every Continent, who don't care a pin's head what Macaulay wrote, and have wasted precious little time on literature, but do know that with economic power you can do pretty well everything. What makes you so tactless, Alden?'

'I don't know. I suppose it's being cooped up with the young for so many years.'

'That's certainly some excuse. But you've been answering arguments that weren't there. You've been shooting at a bird that flew away years since. You've been—'

'I'll tell him what he's been doing, Sadhuji,' said Findlay. 'Once when I was in one of those trains that dawdle down the coast through Orissa, we waited for fifteen minutes at a station where I saw a blind man sing and dance and skip round and round in front of a carriage near mine. There was a bucolic chap watching him carelessly enough, who suddenly broke into a broad grin. Do you know why? He'd just noticed that the blind man had been performing in front of a coach that hadn't anyone inside it, and it struck him as funny. That's what Robin did.'

'Anyway, what does it matter?' asked Alden resentfully.

'Nothing at all,' said the Sadhu. 'Except that you've convinced Dinabandhu that you're a fool. And Dina-bandhu's realist enough to hold that it doesn't matter what's done to a fool. I've had trouble enough, Alden, trying to save you from the arrow that flies by night. Why did you make that gang of chaps you caught round the fire think that you have the devil's own Criminal Investigation Department at your beck and call? There's a school that believes your head is full of names that the police want to get hold of, and that a bullet through it might save a world of bother.'

Alden put his palms together in deprecation. Then he changed the subject.

'Jayananda Babu, help me to get this man to see sense. He has been wandering about all night, doing

what he chooses to have fixed on as his duty. Tell him there's neither wisdom nor kindness to any one in it.'

'How did *you* spend the night, Rob?' asked Findlay.  
'That's neither here nor there.'

'You sure of that? Vairagi, Rob cycled through from Suryakonda, for no earthly reason but to see what I was doing. And before that—how long is it since you rested a whole night through?'

'Yes. But *my* foolery has a special and temporary reason. If one of your students gets cut up you can't act as if everything is normal. But John tempts the Lord his God on principle and always.'

'Alden talks of a special and temporary reason,' said the Sadhu, 'after which everything will revert to the normal again. Haven't you realised that nothing is ever going to be normal again, as you islanders count normality? The unchanging East has become Vesuvius. Alden, you'll have special reasons for special watchfulness and special action, as long as you stay in India.'

'I am not going to tell you, Alden, who chopped up your boy,' Jayananda said, all of a sudden.

'We never thought you would.'

'You've had the knowledge in your hands, twice. And each time scattered it. Alden, Alden, our reincarnation beliefs are right. The Wheel of Existence embraces all beings, gods and elves and pixies as well

as men. In Elizabethan times you were not Robin Alden but Robin Goodfellow. You overturned carts in mire, you sawed planks across brooks asunder, you hung out lanterns above evil-smelling bogs.'

'Oh, I say!'

'You did. Character persists. You are doing it now. When you came to visit Findlay last Christmas holidays, you set up a scare that has hardly passed off.'

Alden had noted a corrugation on a simul trunk facing a bend on the main jungle road, which had the semblance of a parrot's head with hooky beak. He had brought a lump of phosphorus, and tinted saliences. The episode which followed was the most awe-inspiring *bhut* legend the countryside had known for centuries. He became aware of the results of his simple scientific experiment when he heard the Magistrate cursing the unknown humorist who had put the District Board to the expense of making a long detour of new road, to evade the demon. As Alden's wife would have asked (luckily she did not know), 'Rob, why do you do these things?' He had never found an answer to that question.

'Never mind, Alden,' the Sadhu said comfortingly. 'When we have turned the English out, you stay on with us and turn Hindu. We understand you, and do not misjudge your ways. We respect you for the same reason that we worship the monkeys; we never know what you are going to do next. Our own holy men

continued to play childish pranks right up to the moment of attaining the Bliss of Brahma.'

'Will you explain all that to Dinabandhu?' asked Findlay.

'I will. And it may keep Alden's brains'—he spoke slowly, that they might catch the seriousness of his drift—'free of a bullet—no, disorganised,' he said; and Findlay noted again that he was still proud of his command of an alien tongue—'for a year or two longer.'

Findlay's way was the direct one, which could not be resented. No Indian, unless long contact with the West had changed him, would hesitate to ask an Englishman outright about any matter, however private. 'What was Dinabandhu doing here? he asked.

'You *ought* to tell us,' Alden pleaded. 'I've looked you up time and again, and you've always seemed communicative and open. But after I've gone I've realised that I've told you everything, and you haven't said a thing back. This time give us a square deal, fifty-fifty.'

This struck Findlay as unreasonable, considering their host's exceptional frankness as to Dinabandhu. But then the Sadhu disliked Dinabandhu, and still more, what Dinabandhu stood for. These facts counted for something even with a Sadhu.

When there was no reply, Findlay asked, 'Shall I tell *you*, Vairagi? I know more than Robin does, by

a long chalk. In India, if you will only not read the papers, you will know everything.'

He read encouragement in the Sadhu's eyes, and continued. 'Everyone says that Gandhi wants to pull out from leadership of the National Movement. And ninety per cent. of everyone says he has besought Jayananda Vairagi to come out of his jungly fastness and take the job on. Now! Have I guessed why Dina-bandhu was here?'

'Mahatmaji knows he can't keep things non-violent much longer,' said Jayananda evasively, and in a manner closer to discontentment than either had ever seen in him. The times, thought Findlay, are tempting even him, as they tempt others, to resume activities he had cast aside for ever. Instantly Findlay knew that he had refused to be drawn back into the riot and anger of Indian politics; but that, nevertheless, he was half-regretful, as a man unsure of his decision.

'Can *you* keep it non-violent?' asked Alden.

Jayananda was silent; and in that silence he finally dismissed the temptation that had found him in his wilderness, and had been allowed to stay after the visible tempter had departed. He read sympathy and knowledge in Findlay's eyes, and his face broke into a smile both wistful and unreservedly friendly.

'I know now,' he said, 'that I am as out of date and obsolete as you two fellows. We belong to an India

that has gone out as completely as the India of John Company days. There is Alden perpetuating the tradition of paternalism. Graciously interested in the folk and their ways, touched by their poetry—you see, Alden, I grant you a great deal.'

'I should jolly well think you ought to! These skies and spaces have gone into my blood, as they have gone into the blood of many an old colonel or district officer who you folk think is hanging on to India just for the sake of what you are pleased to call exploitation. You haven't begun to realise the way our brains move. We simply don't look on India as alien, least of all when we are following our fathers, as many of us are. John and I are missionaries because—well, I'm not sure that it isn't because we are both the sons of missionaries. Vairagi, it's where a man spends his hours of solitude that marks him. You know where mine have been spent; you know where I spend them now. On my soul, I'm never sure *why* I look you up. It's for your sake, right enough; I've never fathomed you yet, and you keep me curious. But, over and above you, there's the hours it takes to reach you, while I cycle through leagues of moon-lit wilderness or seeing the forest by day open into a hamlet as if it had found an eye and then, when I plunge into the miles on the other side, close that eye again. Grant me a great deal, indeed! And what do you grant Findlay, pray? And what do you grant yourself?'

'I came here because I was in love with what I had seen behind my office files all the time I was serving your Raj, and with what I had learnt to see as I heard the songs on the road and the legends of my people. India,' he said, as in a trance, 'the Forest-Dreamer and Forest-Dweller, watching time pass by in a kind of afternoon silence and sunlight! It has all gone—my dreams and your service. You have a new India on the stage, one that has seen wealth and power and arrogance, and wants to have a hand in the game. You've shown us another world, that seems greedy and glowing and strong, that seems to have everything, that crowds life with possessions. Now, Alden, tell me, what has the War done to your world?'

'You mean, the one where my people live?'

'Of course.'

'It's shortened life by half, and made it a thing that races by, from youth to middle age, and then to senility and impotence. We can't wait; we won't wait. And we believe there's nothing, sheer *nothing*, Vairagi, once this life has vanished. That's why we're so greedy of time and goods, and so reckless. Even if we buy what we want by the suffering and robbery of others, does it matter? The injured generation would have lost its chance anyway; and in the flick of an eyelid—as the Gods count time—it will be gone, and a new one will be thrown up, which may have better luck. The old one is dust and bones, and any

wrong it had to put up with is only a story. And what does a story matter?" asked Alden bitterly.

'Do you think the same change hasn't come over us? Do you think the new industrialised India is willing to go back to the village and the spinning-wheel, when it has seen the life of the movie and the power of the machine? I tell you, Gandhiji has seen something that has frightened him.'

'I know,' said Alden. 'He's too old to change his battle-front, so he fights on upon the old one. But he must know—when he stops to think—'

'Before he hurries on with eyes shut or averted,' said the Sadhu.

'That the foe isn't *there* any longer. His non-violence is just part of the whole foolery, one with your and our harking back to finished ideals and dreams.'

'Rob's wrong,' said Findlay. 'They are not finished. I have found them still here, Vairagi. We shoved our own noisy life upon the real life, which persists now as it did in Galilee.'

'That's all very well,' said Alden. '*Your* life isn't noisy, John. Mine is.'

'It isn't where you really live, Rob. I've known you all these years, and I've seen your restlessness dying down, even while your jobs were growing beyond all reasonable limit. And India,' he said earnestly, 'is bound to get back to her old high road, though she's

doing this bumpy detour for a time. *Now what do you say, Rob?*'

But all Robin said was said to himself:

'While three men hold together,  
The kingdoms are less by three.'

The reflection, however, brought him little of conviction or comfort. The time has gone when a fine sentiment could heal the soul of its sickness.

'I know now,' said Findlay, 'how decent Indians feel about staying in the Empire. It must be the way Nonconformists feel about coming into the Church of England. They must wonder if it isn't the only sanity, if you want to keep any organised government or organised religion at all, unless you are prepared for the risks of autocracy. But what unforgivable snobbishness and narrowmindedness and hardfaced folly you have to accept! And yet—when your mind recoils at memory of all this—I *know*, though I'm not a Nonconformist!—you suddenly remember all kinds of individual decency and honesty, and your mind softens again.'

'I knew there must be Englishmen who could understand,' said the Sadhu. 'But why do we never meet them?'

'Is there going to be peace, Sadhuji?' asked Alden presently.

'Not till England and India come face to face.'

'You mean?'

'He means,' said Findlay, 'not while the non-violent humbug talks to the look-what-we-have-done-for-India humbug.'

'Then there'll be a chance when the unbragging India comes face to face with the unbragging England?'

'Yes. If one Indian can judge.'

'It's going to be hard for England,' said Findlay softly. 'She has too many ghosts behind her eyes.'

'What do you mean, John?'

'I mean that you can't see straight, with so many *bhuts* trying to use your one set of retina and visual nerves. You have the ghosts of the American Revolution, of Ireland, of South Africa, all crowding in upon one vision. God help her when she comes to that council-table. For she wants to be decent and honest and fair.'

#### XIV

THE INTOLERABLE DAYS WERE MADE TOLERABLE BY the smoothing-out of mind with mind, during the week that Alden spent at Kanthala. 'What did you two do?' Frances asked afterwards. 'We wore bath-towels, and talked,' he answered. The almost nakedness of Gandhi, which has so impressed the American public, is sanity if you stay down in the great heats.

'You and I', he told Findlay, 'have only so much energy for this life. I want you a while longer. I simply can't face this new India that's coming out of

the India I love and understand, unless I've got one man with me who's seen the things I've seen, and dreamed my dreams. I'm going to see it through,' he said grimly. 'And I want you to be standing by me when we come out on the other side.'

### XV

THEN HE RETURNED TO VISHNUGRAM, TO BE A PROWLER till College reopened. Dead wood had to be cleared out, rats and snakes evicted and slain, hostels explored for weaknesses. Having a duty to the Hamars also, he patrolled their compound; and took over Rustum, Hilda's waler, whom he removed to his own stables. The Hamars' other horse had gone with his master to Darjeeling.

The last responsibility brought back remembrance of earlier days, with their sense of valueless, infinite time. Men had moved by horse from place to place, had pitched tents, had mingled shooting with work, in the cold weather had taken wives and daughters with them. Then the car had come, and had turned time into a brittle, jagged thing, whose fragments were reluctantly spent on duty at a distance. Alden was not car-minded, and there were times when he remembered regretfully the sound of hoofs stepping up in the quiet of dawn and the stamping of a horse as it waited. But he was content to be free of worry,

after much experience of the sinking of heart with which a man sees his syce approaching, solemn delight and importance in his demeanour, and knows the preliminary cough is getting ready, that is prologue to a tale of sudden lameness. In the same painful school he had learnt the absurdity of hoping that any good can ever be done by such veterinary assistance as Government has provided in a land of cows, where the horse is a rare creature and commonly as depressing and uncomely as even the Indian cow. Since the past plainly wished to go, he had let it go, and left his saddle to rot. A bike meant peace of mind, to a man who has grown into his forties in India more precious than rubies. The Hamars, still keeping horses, were an anachronism in this small station.

## XVI

WHEN HE MET MAYHEW OUTSIDE THE ENTRANCE to the bazaar, he had temporarily forgotten the Hostel outrage.

'They're getting to know every last damned thing,' the policeman complained.

'Who are?' asked Alden, puzzled.

'These blighters. You can trust no one nowadays. You might say I had my hand on the chaps who cut your boy up. My sub-inspector at Ranibund got their names from a fellow who was in a blue funk

of his life. The chap refused to see me when I was down there; the only thing he would do was to send in a letter by a bullock-driver who thought he was bringing me a bale of tusser with his own logs. The bullock-driver never came through, but turned up outside the Ranibund *thana*<sup>1</sup> the morning after he had set out, with a yarn that *bhuts* had bewitched his bullocks in the night and spun them right round. My sub-inspector has the wind up. He is sure that there's black art at work, and that it leaked out that the names are known. He pretends the paper got lost. The truth is, he's destroyed it himself, and isn't going to say another word. If those fellows were brought to trial, or even jailed, he's certain their pals would know it was his doing, and would shoot him down.'

### XVII

ALDEN SOON REALISED THAT BHUTS WERE BUSY enough. The Ancient Gods were rising from their slumber of decades, the stirring abroad in their land had blown upon even their drowsy lids. The resident Lakshmi was seen again by the vast banyan where Alden had surprised the figures round the fire. Folk gave the tree a wide berth, though one would have thought that they would have flocked to get glimpse of a goddess gracious and lovely beyond

<sup>1</sup> Police-station.

poetic dreams of woman. The water-sprite of the great College pond was seen at dusk, sometimes floating on the surface, sometimes grazing on the bank in the disguise of a buffalo.

'Ah, then, I have seen her,' Robin told a student.

The student was sure that his Principal was mistaken. It was not to be thought of that a buffalo seen by the gross vision of a beef-eating European was the lady of the lotuses.

This legend developed into grisly fact, when Alden's bearer, bringing in his early morning tea, told him that still earlier the *devi* had gripped fast a man who had gone in to steal her lotuses, tied him up with reeds, and then drowned him. He had been found with chin just uptilted above the rank growths.

Alden went out immediately. The body lay on the bank; a woman was keening beside it. Her plaint seemed to hold no sorrow; she stopped curiously to look at the saheb, and wonder what he would do. There was nothing he could do; and she took up her dirge again.

The man was a postman, who had formerly for a very brief period been one of Mayhew's servants. A week after the tragedy, Alden caught his gardener looking at him with a mixture of awe and pity. The look followed him so constantly that at last it held his attention, and he demanded its reason.

Did not the saheb know what everyone knew?

The saheb did not know it. He desired to know it. The man, his words pausing with wonder, as at one whom the Gods have marked and set apart for some fearful fate, told him that every night, about the hour of ten, the ghost of the dead postman appeared on Mayhew Saheb's veranda and shouted '*Dak*' ('Mail'). Thereupon Mayhew Saheb rushed out, but found no one there. A moment after, the cry of *Dak* sounded on Alden Saheb's veranda, and Alden Saheb rushed out eager for his letters, he also to be confronted with emptiness and the unseen's mockery.

'I'm sick of tragedy, of alarums and excursions,' Alden told Mayhew, as he passed on this interesting common experience. 'We evidently—there is a vast body of witness against us, in which our own servants are included; you'll never get the bazaar to give the yarn up—do things of which we are deeply and utterly oblivious. Though I knew right enough,' he went on musingly, 'when I was dragged out of bed for that boy who was cut up. And I knew when I was hauled away from breakfast to see this fellow that the *devi* had drowned! (We haven't had a single lotus pinched since. Not that I care whether they're pinched or not.) Shall we ever know a quiet life again? In the old days massacre and maiming and sudden death erupted into your life every two or three years. Now they do it biweekly, almost.'

*XVIII*

IT WAS HILDA WHOM THE BHUTS TROUBLED NEXT. Determined not to sink into the station lady, after her marriage she experimented in Indian farming, in a resolve to know what the fields would raise, and what they would not.

'What's the sense in it, Hilda?' Robin had asked. 'It's a record already, that Vincent has been here for four years. It's tempting Providence, to tie yourself up with land and crops. You'll be transferred, surest thing, the morning after. Frankie and I want to keep you both.'

'I don't care. I've got the money to play with, and I don't mind losing it. It's my way of educating myself. I saw these people when I used to wander out into their jungle villages. I want to see what they grow, and if I can't find new things for them to grow. Besides, Rob, it's my vocation; and 'tis no sin, as Falstaff remarks, for a man—or a woman, either—to labour in his vocation. If I hadn't married Vincent, I was going to have turned farmer down in Somerset.'

'I can guess what your farming would have been.'

However that may be, Mrs. Vincent Hamar these two and a half years had learnt something about the exceedingly primitive methods whereby the Bengal peasant tries to persuade the niggard gods of earth and sky to yield him enough to keep him alive. The

process had had interruptions, as when her first-born had broken in upon it. Her brother-in-law, as well as her husband, kept a more or less watchful eye upon her endeavours, until she managed to make herself understood. She bought a long stretch of execrably farmed land bordering the river Gandeswari, and set peasants on to it under her supervision, to grow ground-nuts and European vegetables, peas and beans and beets and lettuce. She had beguiled herself into the pleasing belief that she saved money on her household expenses thereby, a delusion which neither of her men-folk shared, though they were wise enough to keep this fact to themselves. The land was cultivated on the oldest Indian system. Hilda as landlord provided ground, seed, instruments, and oxen—the last not the depressing animals in local use, but bullocks imported at great expense from the upcountry; and the proceeds were to be halved between her and her peasants. Actually she subsidised the latter extensively, for usually the major part of the crop went wrong. There was abundance of water, even after the Rains had finished and the river had sunk out of sight; all you had to do was to dig holes in the sand. But a crop like peas would be left with insufficient water, and would die when in blossom. Or they ripened, and porcupines, rats, squirrels, wild pig, parrots, took whatever part of the plant appealed to them.

Since she was not out for profit, all this, however vexing, was immaterial to her keenness. She became obsessed with a genuine sense of being 'called' to this job of finding new economic outlets for her folk. If she could persuade them to grow such crops as the Europeans and (no doubt, once they found them in the bazaar) the local gentry would be glad to buy, she would have lifted them out of the stupid rut of growing rice of insufficient quality, in scanty quantity, for a market return that barely kept alive. She had persevered, and this year, before leaving for the Hills, had taken in a long new tract, which thrust a tongue into a range of scrubby moorland, diversified with trivial water-courses in the Rains bringing a catch to her heart with their resemblance to the tumbling brooks of her native Somerset.

### XIX

THE RAINS BROKE ON JUNE 14TH; AND ON THE 16TH, Hilda arrived from Olympus. She had left her nine-months-old, and made the steaming, tiresome journey for this, to see her peasants set about their comically unimportant operations. It was a trifle, yet many a woman whom circumstances had less conspired to spoil would not have thought of doing it. Robin approved the useless action.

He learnt of her return when a message reached his dreams, from a servant murmuring above his bed, that she had reclaimed her horse. A scribbled note with his tea confirmed this:

'Just a line to say I'm back to see about that danga land! The syce is going on, after giving you this, to tell the people they are to interview me in *your* presence *and with your assistance* on *your* veranda, at 9.30 sharp! So I shall honour you at breakfast! Rejoice therefor!

Robin, make it decently early if you can! I've got clean out of your lazy Plains ways, and I want to get back to jobs in the house. Besides, you and I shall both be busy this evening!

Lovingly—HILDA.

P.S. I'm taking Rustum out. So you can get in an extra hour's sleep!

P.P.S. Children splendid! So's Frankie. Lots of love from us all!

HILDA M.H.'

He himself, if enjoining a séance upon villagers at six miles' distance, who presumably had already after some fashion, however shiftless, planned their day, would have suggested evening. He knew how long it took to get a notion across to whatever mental centres they had that controlled action. Yet he had no doubt that at a few minutes after nine Hilda's

peasants would reach his veranda. His morning was arranged for.

He studied her missive as it stood beside his shaving mirror. 'Quite a long letter from a lady in a hurry! She seems to think the art of punctuation, as of life, consists in a lavish use of exclamation marks. "You and I shall both be busy this evening." I suppose it doesn't occur to you that maybe I have jobs of my own to do!'

But he knew that he was delighted to have her back.

She was a Juno who followed hard upon announcing Iris. You dreamt a vision of peacocks; she was present. While he thought of her as Himalaya-haunting, into the mind's drowsy first vague consciousness had slid this news, that she was in Vishnugram. Later, stripped for his shower, he caught a lush, rasping, seesawing noise. *That* cow (a notorious criminal) was wrenching up a bush jasmine. Towering in wrath and a bath-towel, he emerged—into a stillness that had gripped his little world. Even that cow was gazing round, as in some Early Italian picture of a thaumaturgy. A gardener's face worked with awe, grief, and horror.

Hilda was hurrying through erupting sods.

In charity remember that she did not know that all through the Rains perspiring bodies pulled a roller back and forth over the turf that she was tearing, that cricket might be possible in October.

At this season the outdoor servants' calendar held no graver offence than to let even a goat stray into those sacred precincts.

Alden grumbled, as he disappeared: 'St. Paul made a good guess when he defined sin as lawlessness.' Brooding on his shattered green, he added, 'And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart.'

He heard her sing out a question, receive his bearer's assurance that the saheb would be out in a minute, and gallop back across the football field. He dressed feverishly, and hustled out, this time to see her loosening Rustum's girths, and handing him over to be cooled off.

He forgot the ruined pitch.

'Hallo, Rob! Say you are half as happy to see me as I am to see you!'

Moreover, she was busy in fresh crime. Her hat was not on her head. It was swinging from her fist.

'Hilda! Put that hat on!'

She kicked out a mud-splashed skirt, and inspected it. She called an instruction after his gardener, gingerly leading Rustum away as if he had hold of a dragon.

'Hilda, how often must I tell you——'

'That the sun's just as bad in the Rains as when he has no clouds over him? Superstition, Rob!'

He laid firm hands on the hat.

'All right, all right. A wilful man shall have his way.'

Since her coming to India, there were two enormities which any male person within sight and ear-shot of Hilda held himself prepared to cry out upon. With the least film on the sky, she refused to take the sun seriously. 'Hilda! Put your hat on!' And at night she ignored snakes, and would walk in slippers, not on paths only, but on the leaf-rustling space under trees. Now, everyone gets careless about snakes. And you can take your moccasined ease by dusk for nine weeks, and never see one. But in the tenth week comes a jar, as a stick suddenly uncoils into a whip just before you step on it. Then you go warily awhile. This had never happened to Hilda. Hence that other shout. 'Mrs. Hamar! Don't walk there without a lantern!' 'Hilda! Please stand still where you are, until I can bring a light to you!'

After breakfast, Robin was interpreter between his imperious sister-in-law and a sullen, frightened, obstinate deputation. He explained that the mem-saheb was going to provide new sorts of seeds, which would bring in more money than mere rice. Most of the seeds were not to be put in yet awhile.

The deputation let him say his say out. It is better to do this with a saheb, who will say it anyhow. The advantage of this is that early in the conversation it uses up energy which otherwise would be still available for his rebuttal of your own case. When Alden ended, they told him, with the manner of men

quietly closing a controversy, that the riverain stretch could not be cultivated at all, because of *bhuts*.

'*Bhuts!*' exclaimed Hilda. 'Of course there are *bhuts!* Tell them that we know there are *bhuts* everywhere. That I went by no less than three trees this morning which are known to be infested by a whole family of *bhuts*, one of them having three ears and seven eyes. That there's a bhutish tree in my own compound.'

But these were no ordinary *bhuts*. Alden's bearer, who had accompanied the deputation and ushered it to the Presence, explained, in his soft, reasonable tones. The memsaheb ought to be told that this bank used to be an old burning-ground. No one could be asked to cultivate a place that had been so used.

'I don't believe it. I won't believe it. I never heard a word of this before. Mangal, is this true?'

Mangal asseverated it was true. Her heart misgave her that it was true. Marking the exasperated hesitation of saheb and memsaheb, all added their solemn testimony that it was true. As the student of Hindu thought will remember, a triple asseveration is an oath. And *guarantees* that a thing is true.

'Why didn't anyone tell me this before? I know the main Gandeswari runs past a burning-ground. But this is just a tumble of hillocks and cracks where

fingers of water—they aren't more—trickle by in the Rains. And the field itself is a downland that's just too far to be convenient to take dead bodies. No one said a word about a burning-ground when I was getting hold of the place.'

'Did you enquire?' asked Robin.

'No, of course I didn't.'

'Ah!'

'How could I foresee the particular line these people's idiocy would take?'

He could think of nothing better to say than to repeat.

'Ah!'

'Robin! I wish you wouldn't keep on ah-ing. Why don't you help me?'

'I'm sorry you didn't call me in at the time.'

'It never occurred to me that there was anything to bother you about. I never saw any signs of a burning-ground there.'

This gave him an idea.

'You,' he said, looking closely at the swarthy forms before them, 'are not the people of Vishnugram. You are Paharia folk, some of you'—he indicated the blackest—'are Sonthals. You bury your dead. You do not burn them.'

Nevertheless, bodies had been burnt on this upjutting bank. Did not the saheb know it was called Bhagabund, 'The Mound of the Fugitives'? Here

had been a battle, long ages ago, between the Rajas of Chhatna and Vishnugram. The dead had been burnt after it.

'So,' said Hilda fretfully, 'I've got to see a good mile of first-class arable land, with water slap beside it all the year round (if you only dig for it), continue in eternal jungle, all because of a fight in the times of the Trojan War! Or it may be further back still, for all these people know! And I can guess what those battles between these wretched little Hindu Rajas were! One man dead on either side, after a week's tomtoming and shouting!'

Alden had been thinking back in memory. 'I remember now, the place *is* called Bhagabund.'

'Well, Robin?' She came to a point. 'What about it? Frankly, I don't feel like being beaten, after coming all the way down. What about going out this evening to investigate?'

He hesitated. 'Do you mind going alone?'

'Yes. I do. I mind very much, when I have a perfectly good brother-in-law to escort me.'

'You know, I'm really not one of the great unemployed. I've other jobs I ought to get done, with College reopening to-morrow.'

'I'm going back to-night, Robin.'

'Oh, nonsense, Hilda!'

'I can't talk to these people properly without your help. Join me in a Psychical Research party.'

'Ought you to go back without a rest?'

'Well—I *am* going.'

'Then I'll spend every minute I can with you.'

'That's handsomely said. I knew you'd want to add your bit to science and the progress of the race. To be in on the first really enlightened enquiry into the nature and substance of *bhuts*!'

He was hers, so without further delay she switched him on to his work of interpretation. Their instructions received, the deputation withdrew. Hilda cantered home. Robin looked after her thoughtfully, then went indoors.

She had apparently drawn the Season also into her service, for the rain kept off all the hours she was out. Then it poured till five o'clock, when it cleared with a finality no one could mistake. Nature made a generous gesture; she wished to leave the evening free for recreation. 'Do what you like, my children!' She waved a hand round the horizon.

## XX

SHORTLY AFTER THE RAIN CEASED, ROBIN HEARD THE clip-clop of fast-stepping hoofs in mud. Rustum arrived for his use; a note said he was not to wait, but to go on ahead of his sister-in-law.

She overtook him, breathlessly vivacious, on a slimly built pony that his mind—guessing instan-

taneously at any fact that shot across the mirror of consciousness, particularly one that connected up with the vigorous life of his youth—tried to ‘place’. ‘Found him this morning, ploughing up the river sands, with a sprawling Sack on top of him. Asked the Sack why it was exhausting a quite good pony in that silly fashion, and Sack tearfully answered that said pony was all fire and fury, and *must* be damped down. Told Sack to lead him cautiously home, and that this evening I would kindly look him over. Sack thanked me very much indeed, as was very meet, right, and its bounden duty, and seemed enormously relieved. Oh, Robin! “Never shake thy gory locks at me!” There’s nothing the matter with him, nothing in the whole wide world, except that he was suffering a fool who was afraid of him. And not suffering the fool gladly, any more than I should have done.’

She brought him to, swervingly—a restraint needed every few seconds. The reined-back body tightened. Again Robin wondered: What pasture made the mettle of those limbs—too slender for a waler’s, too knit and competent for the local brand of country-bred’s?

‘You haven’t said a word, Robin!’

‘I’ve been thinking. He’s Burmese of sorts, except that you don’t see Pegu ponies any longer. He’s leish, as we say in Cumberland.’

'What's that?'

'Slight.'

'But, I hope, not ineffective?' She turned enquiringly.

'By no means. What made you put a side-saddle on him?'

'Because he had such an absolutely ripping shoulder for it. Also, the only decent other one is Vincent's, which you are using. Do I look like Patience on a monument?'

'More like Impatience on an earthquake.'

'He's only excited to find himself ridden,' she explained, 'and not merely *clamped down* by a huge, fussy noise. It isn't easy' (she apologised, smiling) 'to keep up a conversation across your shoulder, on a taut rubber ball that keeps on bouncing. That jerk all but yanked my arm out.'

She let the bridle run till the neck framed an arc, the pony seeming to try to peer between his knees. 'Your girths are all right,' she assured him. 'I saw to them myself. Having a use for your head, I propose to reclaim it. Didn't you wonder how I was going to turn up?'

'How was I to tell? You might borrow the wings of the evening. Or a black, scudding monsoon cloud.'

'Steady, Monsoon Cloud!'

'I thought you *might* be stealing one of the police horses.'

'Thanks! I can see myself on one of them!'

'Until your note came, I took it for granted—so far as it crossed my mind at all—that I should be push-biking through one Ganges after another, in the wake of disappearing and distant Rustum.'

'Aren't you glad it's otherwise?'

'Very. But I'd be happier if you'd take over Rustum.'

'And why?'

'He knows you!'

'Well? So will Monsoon Cloud, very shortly. Besides, I have to give in a report to the Sack. After Rustum, he seems so—*trivial*,' she added compassionately.

'Only too obviously he's thinking along similar lines about you. Unless you've exaggerated his sufferings this morning.'

'No exaggeration. He was doing a horse's job,' she said with conviction. 'An elephant's, rather.'

'Well, it's a different worry that's preying on his mind now, judging by the question in his eye. *Your* weight's not bothering him.'

'What question? I can't see it.'

'Will no one rid me of this turbulent goddess? He believes he's taking Kali to a ghosts' picnic—with the thunderstorm about to burst all round him.'

'Robin! how poetic you are! And how complimentary! Will you feel better if I let him out?' She was

ahead, but pulled up, to call back, 'But doesn't she prefer a tiger?'

'For state occasions she takes a lion.'

'But a *tiger* for ordinary hacking?'

He smiled agreement.

The road, dividing, swirled round an unpolled spinney, whose heart held the *thakur's* extensive stud of clay horses and elephants. His duty was to scour the neighbourhood, scaring away *bhuts*. As his reward for this important service to the mortal community, goats were sometimes beheaded above a cleft stick. Hilda took the right track, a glade curving like a scimitar and cutting wide slices out of the forest. Robin saw her astonishingly accelerate speed, in a racing swerve that all but collided with the jungle on the other side. He had scarcely time for horror, before he needed all his wits for himself. Rustum also seemed to want to plunge through pathless wilderness.

Overtaking her, he looked his amazement. Nothing, he thought gratefully, could discompose that boyish buccaneering swagger. Her hat was ring-straked from its buffets; Hilda, the essential Hilda, was unruffled.

'I did right, as it happens,' she said complacently.

'I have no doubt you did. But in what way?'

'If I'd had a limb *there*'—she pointed to the pony's off side—'I'd have left it in the forest. Robin!' (turning towards him).

'Yes?'

'Will you believe me when I say how sorry I am?'

'Sorry for what?'

'For setting Rustum off.'

'You didn't.'

'Then what did?'

'It was a leopard set them both off.'

She turned wide eyes of delighted surprise on him.

'A leopard?'

'Yes. It was quite like old days.'

'But how, Robin?'

'You always knew when there was a *bagh* about, because your horse would sheer off from a harmless wayside tuft. They can smell when anything unusual's been by.'

'You really mean—there was a *leopard* there?'

'Somewhere near. But I never knew any horse that was such an utter ramping fool as these two. It used to be a dainty skip sideways and perhaps a twenty yards' rush.'

'*That* was our fault, at any rate, Monsoon Cloud. What was it?'

'Hereditary lunacy, probably. Induced in the first instance by human lunatics. You've never seen a Burmese village. Its amusements are simple but hearty. As soon as it's evening, the girls all light whacking cheroots, and sit back to watch the fun. The boys then all mount ponies, and for two or three hours without pausing ride breakneck races from one

end of the village to the other, and back again, shouting all the time. When your beast got the shouting this morning, he knew what was wanted. But the river sand postponed performance. He's probably puzzled because you're so quiet.'

'And on top of *that* uprising,' she cried, 'to be aware of leopardly eyes glaring from the shade!'

'Yes, it was hard. *Cruel 'ard, as they say.*'

'Where do they say a delightful thing like that?'

'In the Midlands.'

'No wonder he exclaimed, in the poet's words—

"Lust of my blood inflamed his yellow balls!"

and tried to bolt! He believes still that every leaf is a thing with teeth and claws, waiting to jump on him!

'He evidently hasn't come across a *bagh* before. If you don't mind, we'll go home a different way. I can return to-morrow, and institute enquiries.'

'You hear that, Rustum? Robin's coming back to look for *baghs* to-morrow.'

'No! Not with Rustum! There's one thing about a bike,' he said appreciatively. 'It doesn't shy. Wouldn't shy even if a sabre-toothed tiger strolled out in front of it.'

'It would if I were on it! Steady, pony! "If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear!"' But I'm not.'

'He's beginning to look like a monsoon cloud.'

'Isn't he? All dampness, and silken, tempory impatience!'

The horses were quieting down, and Robin's peace of mind was returning.

## XXI

PRESENTLY SHE SAID: 'ROBIN, I DON'T BELIEVE IN YOUR leopard.'

'Oh! Then may we have your theory?'

'I believe that glade is a trench the *bhuts* have thrown up in front of the grove. They're waiting for night, to rush the grove, after another battalion of *bhuts* have decoyed the *devata* to the other side. We came on them unceremoniously, and enraged them.'

'You may be right.'

'Robin!' She looked at him keenly. 'What's up?'

'Ah, nothing. Only I was thinking, if you'll forgive me, how little our women know about India.'

'I've often thought the same myself. And wondered if it was all our fault.'

'No. It isn't. It may have been inevitable. But it's been our biggest mistake.'

'Why did you ever let us make it?'

'We couldn't help it. And, even if we could have done, I'm not as sorry for that part of the business as I might be. In fact, I'm glad you don't have to face

it. But Hamar has to face it; and Mayhew has to face it; and I have to face it.'

'Face what, Robin?'

'The monstrous regiment of *bhuts*. I'm beginning to think that there's something elemental in this land, that's in revolt against us. It's ceasing to be a matter for argument, although Gandhi occasionally unbends so far as to put up what he's pleased to call argument. I never can see why he bothers even as much as he does. *I* shouldn't waste time arguing, if I had small-pox and fever on my side, and the sun and the moon and the very sods of the ground.'

'I'm afraid I don't understand.'

'I've said already that I'm glad you don't. I think the age from time to time, in one land or another, gets sick of a certain people, and gets rid of them. It isn't reason, it isn't even the sword, that kicks them out. It's the *bhuts*. They're doing it now with the English, all over the world, and most of all in India.'

'Can the world find any better people?'

'No. It can't. At any rate,' he said sturdily, 'they are my people, the people whose ways I understand, and I'm going to stick by them. But the age is tired of us, and wants a change. I guess it's going to have one.'

'Robin, honestly—'

'It told you, Hilda, that you wouldn't be able to see any sense in what I was going to say. It's nothing I can put down, so that it will *seem* sense. But will you listen?'

'Of course I'll listen.'

'Practically nine-tenths of the things they say against us are lies, and you could show them up to anyone with half a brain, who would listen. It isn't that they haven't a case against us. They have; and it's a deadly black one, in some ways. I've often wished the Nationalists would let me handle their brief! Just for once, to show how a good job could be made of it!'

'I had rather gathered that your countrymen's complaint against you was that this was exactly what you have been doing for twenty years.'

He laughed with her at this. 'Not for so long as that. When I first came out, I was a pukka John Bull. You ask my earliest students, if you ever come across them! But they don't put their case—I had to find it out for myself, by the way—they are out simply to spatter mud, and stir up hatred.'

'Haven't they succeeded pretty well? There's hatred enough abroad, isn't there?'

'Yes. And anyway, it no longer matters what they do or say, or what we do or say. The quarrel has gone deeper, down to where the *bhuts* live.'

They both laughed, at the absurdity which appeared to be entangling him in melodrama. He went on, however.

'Say it's the hot weather, say it's the folly of pretending to run education with everyone bitter and with strikes coming for every trivial thing that

happens anywhere in India. But there's something stirring that's getting on our nerves. You can't use guns against it, as you could do once. You have got to remain decent, however indecent the other side is. What can you do about it? You can't fight it, you can't argue with it, you can't even see it most of the time. But it's there. We are living on into another age. We haven't a new technique, and we are afraid to use the one that we learnt in the age that has gone.'

'Mixed, Robin!'

'I know it is. But, anyway, I'm beginning to believe in *bhuts*—in something dull, stupid, brute, malignant, invulnerable, with feet that take hold of the very soil. And it's in league with other *bhuts*, that are not *bhuts* at all, but *devatas*, living in an upper air of dreams and enthusiasms. It's an unnatural alliance, but a powerful. You think I'm talking through my hat. How *could* you understand, Hilda, unless you had to spend day after day, and year in, year out, standing sentry against these serried forces of earth and air?'

She did understand, nevertheless. Her mind travelled back to that afternoon on Senchal, three years ago, when a spirit had come from the bamboo copse, and stalked by her—unseen, but

'Discerned tremendous from the quaking sod.'

Her own preoccupations and her happiness seemed a sordid thing.

## XXII

THEIR VISIT WAS A WASTE OF TIME. 'I'VE GATHERED the impression,' said Hilda, 'that neither George nor the Mahatma is ruler here, but the Past is king.'

'Yes,' said Alden. 'It's sitting here, waiting for us to go, and wondering how much longer we shall take or how many more hints we need. I expect the Spirit of Britain was once sitting on the Roman Wall. While the legions were lingering on behind it, and wondering why their hearts were so discouraged!'

Nothing could shake the story they heard, of *bhuts* that moaned and cried in the simulks, or dropped from their boughs on the belated wayfarer. They came like sudden winds from nowhere, and swept the Fugitives' Mound from end to end. The old battle was fought afresh, the wrinkled ridges were crowded anew with the terrified, the bloodthirsty, the dying, all one in this, their implacable hatred of men that still lived in the sunlight.

'I'll have to dedicate it as a park,' said Hilda.

'That's an idea! Is there any need to hurry back?'

'None at all, for my part.'

'Let's have a talk.'

'I'd love it.'

'I haven't had one for ages. That's why, when I do get one, I'm apt to come out with the whole lid off at once.'

He led the way over a ruined but still serviceable bridge, which crossed nothing but the neck connecting two marshes. He pointed to a pool and a wild date-palm, flanking the path on opposite sides.

'I had as jolly a fall as I ever had, just here.'

'I don't see how.'

'It was in March, when (as you know) we usually get a week's rain. We'd had a couple of days of it, and I was riding here, at nothing but a jog-trot, when my mare went full length and shot me forward, to scrape up a good part of the surface soil of Bengal before I hove to.'

'Robin! how horrid! How I should hate to have that happen!'

'I investigated, naturally. There's usually a small pool, not only on our left, but filling that scooped-out, muddy bowl under the date-palm.'

'I see.'

'The date's pool is shallower, so had dried up. And a rat colony that lived under the date had tunnelled across to the other pool, under the path. The rain loosened the earth above their engineering. So the mare's front feet shot right in, halfway to her knees. Of course she came down, and I with her. That's why, Hilda, it's just as well to keep your eyes skinned, however sound the road looks. We'll sit on the wall of this bridge; it's a dry place.'

'I'll tie up the creatures.' She jumped down. 'Let me do something, Robin.'

'No, not here. Gracious, child! Hasn't anyone ever told you that any horse will eat oleanders, and oleanders are poison? I'll lead them to those trees.'

'Have you found out anything about who cut up your boy?' she asked presently.

'No. Never shall. It's like that in India. People's lives go swirling along like rafts on a river in the monsoon. Something hits one, like a water-kelpie's hand pushed out from the stream. It sinks. It's no good asking who did it, or what particular hole the kelpie's gone back to.'

'Those rats that fetched you down? Do you think they were put up to it by the *bhuts*?'

He shook his head.

'The *bhuts* weren't so busy then. They used to leave sahebs alone.'

'Really?'

'Oh, yes. Yet I don't know. No doubt they've always been morosely inclined towards these plaguey aliens. Did you hear Douglas's farewell speech to the Christian community, before he went on furlough?'

'No. I came in too late. All the garlanding and speechifying was over.'

'Well, he was explaining how he ever came to think of starting the College. He represented the idea as arising out of a chat between the Almighty and him-

self, which seems to have been a highly humorous performance, partly because the Almighty talked such bad Bengali. Douglas has been so used to every one treating him with grovelling regard, that he represented the Lord as using the honorific,<sup>1</sup> and saying very respectfully, "If Your Honour doesn't start a College—” ”

'I'm entirely on the Lord's side. If I were the Almighty, I should use the honorific, Lord or no Lord, when addressing some sahebs I know.'

'For example?'

'Vincent,' she said loyally. 'Findlay, of course. And I think Douglas. He's been a pretty magnificent brick, making other bricks all these years with precious little straw. And for how many years did the rest of you, those who were here in those days, think he was a fool?'

'Until we realised how much prestige the College gave us among the surrounding heathen.'

She laid her hand on his knee in sudden impulsive affection. 'And there's another man I'd use the honorific to, every time.'

'Ah ! You don't know him as well as I do.'

'I know him well enough. Robin, have you ever wondered—?'

'About what?'

'Why I happen to be so absurdly fond of my brother-in-law?'

<sup>1</sup> Bengali has double forms, one respectful, the other familiar.

'Yes. I have. It's a very blessed and delightful fact, but I've never seen any reason for it, except the general reason that you seem to have the habit of doing the thing that gives a man most pleasure.'

'No, of course you haven't any notion of the extent to which a school-girl is prepared to hero-worship the man who comes to her home as her sister's accepted lover. And I was at the added disadvantage of having no brother of my own. Providence left me, like Falstaff, most heinously unprovided for. And then Frankie, bless her! set things magnificently right.'

'I've never done anything but what any man would thank his stars for the chance of being able to do.'

'Oh! Is that so?'

'Yes.'

'Chivalrously and gallantly put—by the man who was good enough to compare me to a rather terrific lady, not so long ago. And you expect me to be mid-Victorian enough to take it for granted that I get a first-class man's mind, as well as his affection, if I happen to want it. No, Robin. I've sense enough to know the value of what your friendship has brought me. I've always known that I should find you, whatever happened, infinitely tolerant, infinitely at leisure for anything I needed. This question of getting married's a pretty serious one. Each one of us,' said Hilda profoundly, 'has the power of bringing into

her people's home the most poisonous person or persons imaginable. Frankie exercised her power wisely.'

She rested her face, leaning forward, on her gloved hand. 'I used to have jolly stupid ideas about men,' she continued. 'That they were clumsy, and insensitive, and domineering. Oh, only in *theory*, Robin. That's the penalty of getting the notion that you've got rather a lot of brains for—what a woman's supposed to do with her life. I now marvel at their decency, and pluck, and the little fuss they make about getting their job done. What else did Douglas say? Or rather, the Almighty, deferring to Mr. Douglas?'

'Well, after all these years Douglas doesn't know the proper way to say "The Hindus". So he coined a new plural, and—as they do in Owdham—dropped the initial aitch. *Indura*. Which is *not* "Hindus", but may pass as a poetical plural for "Rats". "If Your Honour doesn't start a College, the Rats will do it".' Now, don't get up, Hilda. I'm just going to get you a bunch of oleanders. It's a shame to come to such a crowd of them, and not bury your face in them.'

He returned; and tossed down another flower first.  
'What's this, Robin?'

'*Gloriosa superba*. A climbing lily.'

'But how *darling!*' she cried. 'How perfectly darling!'  
'Isn't it? That was the only one I could find. They

come out later on in the Rains. This used to be a great place for them.'

'It seems to be ribbons of every shade between green and scarlet, leaves that haven't quite made up their mind to turn into flowers. I want some for my garden.'

'It's poisonous.'

'I shan't mind. I can spare a few dozen of our visiting goats.'

'We ought to be getting back', he said presently.

### XXIII

As SHE BRUSHED HER SKIRT DOWN WITH HER HAND, HE pointed along the Fugitives' Mound.

'I know why you set your heart on this place, Hilda.'

'Of course you do. If it only had green grass on it all the year round, it would be a miniature bit of English downs. A mile of long rising field, thickening up into a perfectly heavenly kind of backbone of dear old Mother Earth. I found it by accident, and thought I should never have gone back. I never found out how far it goes, for the Gandeswari finishes just at this bend, and the ground now becomes all tiny nullas that don't seem to have a name.'

'Do you know where this *bhut*-infested plot actually does finish?'

'I've told you, this is Nansen's Furthest North, so far as I'm concerned.'

'It finishes in the shrine of the *bhut* who's the noblest Roman of them all. A British *bhut*. Ever heard of Klemmon Saheb?'

'Who would he be?'

'I don't know. Perhaps McClelland Saheb. He indigo-planted here, more than a century ago. He had a place up there, just at the foot of the hills. He's buried in the ruins of his garden, and they keep the place as a shrine.'

'Is he the ghost for whom they put out a bottle of whisky and a couple of cigars every night?'

'Goodness, no! The price of a bottle of whisky, now that Government's doubled the tariff, would clean out the whole village.'

'I mean, of course it's the one bottle, bought a century ago, and now probably fabulously valuable, after mellowing so long.'

'No, Hilda. I'm afraid that's a picturesque legend. They tell it in every Province of India.'

'Anyway, if I'm ever belated at dusk, and afraid to go through the battling *bhuts*, I'll betake myself to the hilly end. If he's a British *bhut*, he'll protect a British lady.'

'I don't know what risks you might be taking, Hilda dear. We might lose you for good!' And he quoted—or, rather misquoted:

'Lest Charon, seeing, shall forget  
Thou art alive, and he a shade.'

'Speaking of *bhuts*, going back we'll dodge the forest if you don't mind.'

Yet at a place of good wide road Hilda, leading, felt a tremor through her pony. Both horses stopped; then moved on with checks and pauses, eyeing the wayside shrubs, where there was nothing to see.

'I tire of this,' said Hilda. 'I'm all for encouraging a new dance, provided it isn't too absolutely silly. But this two-step Monsoon Cloud wants to practise ceases to be interesting. If I once get him past what one may call the zone of fear, I shall put it up to him strongly that he ought, as a self-respecting horse, to make up for time lost in idle dissipation. He seems to think leopards grow on every bush!'

Glancing behind, Robin saw a long shadow bound across the road. It paused midway, to look after them. He thought, 'The brute has been following us up'; but kept his vision to himself.

'I'm sorry for the Sack to-morrow,' said Hilda.

'Why?'

'Why? Because I'm afraid he won't think his pet's manners have improved by association with a lady. And it won't be any use putting it down to the *bhuts*—though it's all their fault!'

'No. It would finish our prestige, if it got about that they've withdrawn our old immunity.'

'I suppose so.' She sighed. 'Then there's very little doubt that at some time in the near future the Sack

is going to curse the Abbess of Aberbrothok. And most unjustly.'

They dined at her house, since she was going by the midnight train. After he had seen her off, he thought: 'You had it all planned and plotted to the last detail, my dear. I was to interview your folk for you in the morning, and go out with you in the evening. And this, with all those young lunatics coming back to-morrow! Well, who cares? Who wouldn't gladly have the change you've given me from files and letters and students? You've done me no wrong, you've done me nothing but your own splendid sort of kindness.'

Her last words to him were: 'Let me know any further news of your *bagh* or *bhuts*. Frankie'll be crazy to know, after I've told her. Good-bye, Robin. I never think of you without being glad.'

#### XXIV

THE STORM-GODS GAVE THAT NIGHT UP TO REVEL, AND Robin slept scarcely at all. Towards dawn the lightning seemed continuous, as if a flaming demon had stalked into his room and stood over his bed. If the demon left, it was to return with the speed of thought. He stood there and opened and closed his dreadful eyes. Thunder crashed and hung about the little square of earth where Robin was pretending to rest.

He began the next day exhausted. It opened fitfully, with a *communiqué* from the President of the Independant Students' Association:

'I have honour to intimete that college shall reopen on Thursday, 17th ult. at 10 a.m. standard time. Studies shall be permited untill next act of opressive brutal bureoucracy for which hartal shall be laid down as per decision of Revolutionery Comittee.'

From this cheery message he turned to the usual pile of parents' letters, some reasonable, the majority childish or sheerly inane. They demanded things possible only if Alden were God Almighty, and his students persons docile and subject to self-control or control by others. He was very conscious that he was not God Almighty; and his one English colleague, the Rev. Laurence Parker Jacks, was detained by fever contracted on holiday at Shillong. Nature, however, was good to Alden; the day adapted itself to his mood, and its hours were one mournful curtain of rain.

As often, the monsoon tidied itself away at the afternoon's close. Alden took advantage of the gap in the weather, to slip away to his bungalow, for a solitary cup of tea. He found his veranda crowded with applicants for interview, wise enough to have seen that it was better to wait here, if necessary for an hour

or even two, than to dog a much-harassed man from room to room of the College. Moreover, the postal peon met him with a fresh batch of letters. On the top of the pile he saw the well-known script of the President of the Independant Students' Asocciation, and opened the envelope, murmuring profanely:

'With thee begun, with thee shall end the day'.

It was a word of friendly reproof and warning:

'It has become known that Collge has becom unsafe, owing to ineability of esteemed authorities to protect students from unscrupulus and dast-  
artly murderers. This is great shame and blot on fair fame of esteemed alma mater, as poet well tells mother of arts and eloquent. If greater care is not taken, without doubt college shall become as poet wordsworth describes, a maid whom there was none to love and not many to praise.'

This was a rebuke. Nevertheless, the great mind was in magnanimous mood; the signature was 'A Well-Wisher'. 'That's satisfactory, at any rate,' said Robin. 'It's nice to know the noble army of skunks is on your side, as it gives you a clear majority when the row comes.'

He lifted his eyes to that packed veranda, and his mind reeled. He felt rebellion sweeping over him. First, all that appealed to his reason had been gradu-

ally loosened from his life out here, it had increasingly become an insane waste of effort and that fleeting, precious gift, time; now even habit, the discipline of years and the iron grip of control, was weakening. Any day now, the Rev. Robert Alden might walk out of his study or office or lecture-room without warning, like that American professor who answered the spring's challenge and left his courses and classes midway for ever. At its most stable, the Indian scene has appeared, to those minds most deeply immersed in it, the merest illusion. It was now, even to Alden the Englishman, a mockery of windy voices and swaying, elvish shadows and distortions.

'I looked at my veranda' (he wrote to Findlay) 'and I saw that fat, foolish bubble, Chandra Babu, who has been haunting me for six months, as Falstaff haunted Prince Hal. Like the latter, I wakened to my folly, and all the sordid crime of my days. "I never saw a beast I hated so" (poet Browning).

"Why," I said, "shouldn't *I* have my own *harta!*?" And a voice at my inner ear shouted "Chuck it!" It may have been a voice from the pit, but I took it for my daemon speaking, as his would have spoken to Socrates in my place, supposing the Wisest of the Greeks had ever been such an ass as to *get* into my place and to waste

the years I have wasted in it. "Yes, I will chuck it! Damn all you fellows on my veranda—damn every jack man and jack ass of you—damn twice as many of you, supposing there were twice as many of you there—damn everybody!" I replied.'

What happened was, he let thought wander. And in a moment it had found its own paths, as undirected thought will. It had focused his gaze on the compound's wilder spaces, away from the dreadful hostels. The rainy mist clinging to the green turf, an egret standing watchfully and most blissfully inactive beside the pond, these had freed him. He had passed beyond them; and the jungle's austerity and clean dry gaps of thorn, the one-by-one winging home of the waterfowl to their pools at dusk, had seemed to him desirable beyond resistance. He had taken the veranda steps in two strides, tossed the afternoon's catch on his table, seized his bike, and gone. 'After three hours,' he had informed the scowling and disappointed mob at his threshold.

It was not until he reached the Sacred Grove, that he remembered the leopard lurking in its white, fragrant darkness. This time he took the leftward path, which within four hundred yards ran into a forest hamlet. The hamlet's rude forefathers saw him coming, and barred the road. He had to dismount.

Pointing to the Grove, they informed him that a

leopard was in its heart. It had killed two of their cows yesterday. What was he going to do about it?

He nearly said, 'Write to Mahatma Gandhi. He ought to take on all these miscellaneous jobs now—tell you what his scheme is when the monsoon arrives late or is insufficient—tackle your wolves and bears and tigers.' But what he did say was that he would 'see'. With this formula he was reluctantly allowed to proceed, though the expectation seemed to have been that he would go in, armed with his bicycle pump, and interview the leopard.

He had to tell Hilda of this confirmation of their common experience and his surmise at the time:

'Why should I harry the Grove's incumbent? Those silly chumps invoke the Spirit of Evil, dwelling in her jungly fastnesses. Then (foolish action number 2) by spilling blood in the sanctuary they have chosen for it, they lure it (as incarnated in a good hefty leopard) to come there, and from there to take a further spring—from this jumping-off place which *they* have given it—right into their lives. I mean, right into their cowsheds. But it's the same thing. Have I not pointed the moral well? *They* nursed the pinion that impelled the steel, they coaxed the *bagh* which made their cows a meal, they wrought this wrong whereat they now do squeal, they sharped the knife whose

glittering point they feel, they for their hurt at devils' feet did kneel, they made the sore they want the saheb to heal, they spake the doom from which they now appeal, they cut the thong that made this bitter weal, they drew the blood (more bright than cochineal) of their dead cows—in fact, it's their own deal. *Naturally* that grove, with the reek of goats' gore always hanging about it, draws any wandering beast of prey. As Milton neatly puts it,

“He with uptilted nostril sniffs the wind,  
And then sets out its toothsome source to find”

or (another reading)

“Leo-pard and hippogriff  
With uplifted nostril sniff,  
Then set off to track the whiff.”

Which reminds me, I *have* seen wolves infesting that grove, and there's been a leopard off and on for the last dozen years, though it had slipped my mind, what with so rarely going there nowadays. I'm not going to bother with Brother Bagh further. The country's overrun with *fiendish* cows, and it's many years now since you could coax me into believing that their death represented a real loss. I own I'm getting a bit unreasonable on the point (but every saheb out here has got to go mad somewhere—let me break out here, instead of peradven-

ture at a worse place). Only, *my* view is, that Brother Bagh is a colleague, a valued coadjutor in the work of making the New India. As Kipling observes,

“By the Great North Lights above him he works  
the Will of God”.

If the folk disapprove, why do they sprinkle the jungle with goat’s blood? They’ve *asked* for him.

“Thus doth Man (whose life is a bubble)  
Ask for trouble, and still redouble  
His trouble, by asking and asking for trouble.  
Selah”.

So the leopard was dismissed. But refused to be dismissed. Next morning Alden’s bearer asked his attention outside, where he silently pointed to *pugs* in the wet earth. During the night the leopard had been walking round and round the bungalow. Rustum had evidently been restless in his stall, and was troublesome when exercised.

An old hand, Alden did not take the *bagh* seriously. He knew that it would either be soon shot, or would hang about the town for a few weeks, surviving a multitude of close shaves, until scared away. Writing to his wife, he placed it as a young *bagh*, seeking a private ‘practice’, after being expelled into the cold, wide world by its parents. In its search it had come across Vishnugram and cows at the same time.

Instantly the world had become a very wonderful place, with beasts in it so easy to catch and kill—a change from the few lean, wary hares that escaped the nooses the folk of the jungle hamlets hung above their tracks. Its sojourn in their midst would mean some mortality among the goat population, a thinning out of cows—in neither case any great matter. Of goats he entertained the opinion held by wise men and women, the world over. In the matter of cows, we have seen that he was prejudiced.

So he saw to it that Rustum's stall was shut in at night by a perfect bamboo trellis, reaching from roof to floor, in place of the merely double poles hitherto used. And he went about the days with mind un vexed. The leopard, as I have said, insisted on being remembered. But its actions at first were such as to win Alden's benevolent regard.

## XXV

JACKS RETURNED ON THE 20TH, NONE TOO WELL, AND took over his hostel and teaching work. The leopard continued to confirm Alden's guess that he was young and energetic. They heard from every quarter of his activities. If half were true, he was a super-leopard indeed. In the afternoon he would be reported as having leapt out of a clump of feather-grass, half-a-dozen miles to the east of Vishnugram, and scared

two children; at tea-time he was slaying goats, half-a-dozen miles to the west; just before dusk, Alden, returning to his bungalow, would find a knot of servants talking outside, and would be told that the sweeper had seen the *bagh* standing there, ten minutes before. The classical poets considered Rumour feminine. In the East Rumour must be masculine, he is too logical. Rumour rightly saw that one *bagh* could not do all that this *bagh* was doing. The first leopard became a leopard and consort. Presently, the town was obviously infested with leopards, they were seen simultaneously in so widely diverse places.

They were a splendid help in the College. The students, whom it was excessively difficult in these days to compel to keep the rules requiring their presence in the hostel by 9 at night, became exemplary. They themselves shut the gates at dusk, or even before dusk, saving their preceptors much trouble.

'We've been in luck this year,' Alden observed to Jacks; and pointed to the hostel gates being drawn to. 'First "the murderers" assisted us to enforce our rules. And now, when the fear of them has worn off a bit, the Lord sends along a *bagh*. As a hostel superintendent,' he said appreciatively, 'a *bagh* takes a lot of beating.'

There was a cynicism and profanity in his words, that jarred on Mr. Jacks, whose answer registered tactful rebuke.

'I think it awful,' he said with a sigh, 'the wickedness and brutality of the things that are done in this country. I can never think of what they did to that poor chap without horror. In a way, I feel we haven't the *right* to be amused by their nervousness. *We* should be funks in their place.'

'I intend to be amused by everything I can get amusement out of,' replied Alden lightly, with a touch of contempt in his tones. He repented it immediately. 'It's the only way I can keep sane,' he said apologetically. 'As for being a funk, I don't mind owning I *am* a funk, in my own place, without any need to swap to theirs. I keep the knowledge under my own hat, for selfish reasons. There are far too many people to whom it would be very valuable, for me to broadcast it.'

He continued to gaze affectionately in the direction of the hostel. 'Good old *bagh*!' he said. 'When my name comes up for canonisation, Jacks, I hope you'll testify. I won't ask you,' he said, for the deliberate pleasure of shocking his colleague, 'to stress "the murderers" as having been *sent*. But I do claim the *bagh* as an undoubted miracle, upheld by a cloud of witnesses. The Devil's Advocate must be told that, when Robert Alden of Vishnugram was sore pressed by the heathen and overburdened with the trivial round and common task, the Lord in His mercy sent a leopard to his assistance, as once He sent ravens

to Elijah's. And I'm going to be just, as a saint should be. What about moving at the next College meeting, that the *bagh* be paid a regular salary, like any other hostel servant? Say half a goat alternate evenings—just to ensure his regularly patrolling the hostel dusk by dusk. It would cost the College only about four annas a day.'

Mr. Jacks did not agree. 'You couldn't possibly suggest using College funds for such a purpose!' he said. 'The Mission auditors would never pass it.'

## XXVI

SCEPTICAL OF CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE, ALDEN WAS inclined to query ninety per cent. of the deeds and places ascribed to the *bagh* or party of *baghs*. Direct evidence succeeded to circumstantial, and came very close.

It came, almost immediately, in superbly helpful fashion. Mr. Gandhi turned up in Bengal, and proceeded to tour the centres of education, leaving a ripple of College strikes in his wake. Having for the time being ended his work in Calcutta, he looked towards the *mofussil*. His train to the upcountry would arrive at Vishnugram at 4.7 in the afternoon, and wait in the station for half an hour, which gave time for an address. Alden was notified by the President of the Independant Students' Association that the

students would be called out in the Mahatma's honour. This he heeded not. But the fact that the Mahatma was going to speak was more disturbing. He had vowed publicly that if there were a fresh strike he would expel the strikers, if it meant emptying the College. He was a man who attached importance to his reputation for keeping his word. Outside opinion expected him to keep it, which was why the last two Calcutta strikes had gone by without a single absentee at Vishnugram Mission College. Even from Mr. Gandhi's point of view, he could see no sense in a strike here. The College was not a Government institution, and to wreck it would leave the Authorities untroubled, while inflicting loss on the town's future and heavy expense on the fathers of local students, who would have to go to Calcutta. But he knew that Mr. Gandhi was living by instinct and passion, and not by reason any longer. To him the College represented Western and modern education, which had emasculated the people.

It was hard enough for Alden. It had for some time been touch-and-go whether the College could continue at all. With your students sullen and touchy almost to the point of insanity, prepared to quarrel with a phrase of Wordsworth's long ago, ready to find insult in a look, education was an absurdity. This new threat might end everything, so far as Vishnugram

was concerned. Alden set his teeth in a determination that it should not.

In 1921, when Mr. Gandhi had gone to the Hindu College at Benares, to call the students out in the Motherland's name, he had been met by an authority locally as powerful as his own. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya had stood against him, and had conquered. But Alden was not Malaviya, he was only an alien; the Vishnugram Mission College was not the Benares Hindu College. Mr. Gandhi in 1929—with ten years of fermenting and ever-increasing lawlessness flowing with him as an irresistible tide—was not the Mr. Gandhi of 1921. Alden scanned his unfriendly horizon; something in the lonely Englishman's ironical fearlessness may have won over the *devatas*, if not the *bhuts*. He was to realise that Powers Unseen were with him; they sent the forest to his help.

Just after 3 o'clock on the day of Mr. Gandhi's coming, he was cycling through the scrubby purlieus of the College, near the point where it joined up with a line of gardens belonging to gentlemen of the town. He was much exercised in mind, as to what he could do. He had no objection to his students hearing the Mahatma; it is part of a liberal education in India to-day. But he had no doubt whatever that, if they heard, a strike would follow. Cursing the task he saw ahead of him, just then he noticed a fine leopard standing across his path. He cycled straight on (this

seemed more sensible than to dismount); it stepped aside, and vanished. Two minutes later, Alden realised that he was not the first who had seen. The main road from the College to the station was crammed with a fleeing mob whose chief ingredient was his own students. Later, from many veracious witnesses he gathered that the road—all possible roads, in fact—had been beset with panthers, one to each strategic point.

He went on to the station, where the Mahatma addressed a gathering in which no student was present (so far as Alden could see). The Mahatma's entourage treated Alden with vast respect; and he gained a great access of reputation, for the iron hand with which he controlled the College. Being a modest man, he did not take to himself the glory, but gave it to his lurking, jade-eyed coadjutor.

### XXVII

HE SAW AND HEARD A MAN WHO HAD CEASED TO BE one of us, and had become an elemental being—a gust blowing up from the earth, a passion enclosed (and barely enclosed) in a wizened, worn-out body. He listened to economics that were twenty years and more out of date, and their mistakes were as nothing beside the fact that centuries of poverty and exploitation had found a voice. Through a

human reed suffering was speaking—not its own, but a nation's. He heard history grotesquely at variance with actuality; and this, too, was nothing beside the truth that the whole East had its terrible indictment against the white beast that has ranged the planet with such vision and cruel strength and ruthless purpose. He was troubled, as a man who loved and honoured this frail, human wisp, by the undertone of weariness, as from a will whose resources were exhausted, though the driving fire remains that moves it on to self-destruction. Behind the speaker were the forces of ruin, which he was serving, though aware of them, and anxious to escape them. 'The man's fey,' he thought. 'It is no longer Gandhiji that is speaking, but something that is going to burst into the Age, and to shatter it.'

And, in spite of his cool detachment, he trembled, as a skilled oarsman might when he first hears Niagara. There was no doubt that their 'haughty life' was 'crowned with blackness,' as Wordsworth found the life of his own day. It was set about with dark, impersonal powers, the powers that may sleep for millenniums, but in the end are roused to a fury that will break through the strongest and most reason-wrought fabric that man can create.

'The Spirit of God has used this man, and has nearly done with him,' he thought. 'He *cannot* last much longer. No human body could be the lamp of such a

flame, and persist. He has done his work, and will be going. I can see a score of places where he has been wrong, and often woefully wrong. But I wish my people could have been his friends. I know he's wrong, yet I daren't say he's wrong. Frankly, I don't understand what I've been watching in India during these last twenty years. I wonder if they'll understand, century from now. No, of course they won't, though they'll write about it as slickly as they do now, these fools that simplify the whole process to a fight between God and Satan. They think they see some rot being repeated over again, some tosh from their picture-books and illustrated Christmas gift-books for boys. A fight for freedom against the oppressor! They neither see our soul, nor India's soul. I don't understand it at all, I'm as much in the dark as to what has been happening as I ever was.'

So there was no strike; and no expulsions. 'The discipline of this i-shkole,' Alden assured himself, 'has been—*bhery bad*. No boy has been expelled for particularly—*disgraceful conduct*. And none has received sebhore—*corporal chastisement*.'

As you look at glowing ashes, there is a moment when the wind drops. The fire dies, there is only drab tissue of dust. The wind springs afresh, the fire is renewed, you forget that it is all but dead. Such an experience came to Alden. Gazing at the eyes burning in the emaciated face, he thought of Findlay also,

whom he had known as youth incarnate, exultant in its own speed and strength. There was only will there now, and persistence whipping up a fading fire. He realised that the generation with which he had aspired and striven was already half consumed. Their energy seemed a dance of marionettes; their weakness was all too real.

### XXVII

MID-SEPTEMBER BROUGHT BACK HIS FAMILY AND HILDA. All through the heat and steaming rains, it had been an immeasurable lightening of his burden to feel that his people were away. Now, with a promise of tolerable days and nights presently, it was comfort beyond words to feel that they were within reach. He was a man who said little where he cared most, though his speech rattled on when he wanted respite and a place for thought and decision.

Four-year old Betty let him into her world of wonders. 'The *patas*' (leaves) 'are c'ying,' she observed truthfully, as they whimpered on the trees, in the swift, terrified wind that swept up, warning of tempest to come. The storm broke with growling thunders, presently to swell to a shattering fierceness. '*Megh bagh kocche*'—'The clouds are playing at tigers'—she told him.

His study was forbidden ground; but she invaded

it, attracted by its roominess, and its outlook on a mango which was the striped squirrels' favourite playing-field. And, like other invaders, she made her conquest secure by giving the aboriginal inhabitant a title-deed to his ancestral home, still partly his on gracious sufferance. When he first found her there, she misinterpreted his lifting his typewriter (in use as a paper-weight) without setting to work on it, and reassured him. 'You won't *intersturve* me, Daddy, if you want to work here.' He thanked her, rendering grave courtesy for courtesy. The excellent new word was her quit-rent, and saved her from ejection.

### XXIX

THE AUTUMN ENTRAPPED HIM IN DEEPER SLOUGHS OF exasperation; and, for the first time in his Indian sojourn, he began to dread his temper passing from his control. The students' unrest drew to a head when a young politician accused of complicity in an assassination starved himself to death. He died in a Punjab jail; and his body moved in halting procession along the railway to Calcutta, at every station received with weeping and passionate homage. At the burning there was a vast crowd, which oratory and emotion moved to a frenzy that sought for relief in revenge or martyrdom or both. A storm at the close marked the belated finish of the Rains. It came

as an omen and a portent, the Old Gods again emphasising that they had abandoned their long neutrality, and were massing against the alien. On the storm-cloud's prostrate body danced the wrathful spirit of the fire-queen; Kali had been visible, many averred, the lightning-serpents leaping at her girdle.

The inevitable *hartal* followed. This time Alden had to let it go, in his weariness. But this is not fair to him. For it was not that weariness gave way; it was the queer, vexing duplicity of mood that made him so often align himself elsewhere than with his own folk. If he had been on the British side of the green at Lexington, he would have fired, and probably fired straight. But he would have walked across afterwards, tempting a bullet, in order that he might speak a word of homage over the slain who had gone down mistakenly (as he held), but gallantly.

I have spoken of Lexington. The same comparison slid into Alden's mind. 'All that rot about Oppression with a trebly big *O*, and Taxation without Representation being Tyranny, leaves me cold,' he observed to Jacks, having no one else by to whom to empty his mind. 'It only shows they were as crafty and unscrupulous and dishonest as our beauties here. I suppose patriots have always been the same. Why didn't they take their stand on the magnificent truth—that they *were* a separate nation, that they had a *right* to be a separate nation, that they were on *their own* fields and

village greens, that they were on *every count* entitled to want to cut themselves loose from that filthy, snobbish, coldly murderous, drab, faithless, convention-worshipping, *legal-minded* eighteenth century?" Alden spoke as if he disliked the eighteenth century. "Why the devil are patriots always such skunks? And *such liars!*"

Unlike his Principal, Mr. Jacks was not without light on the problem. "Don't you think," he asked gently, for Alden's language seemed to him to verge on the indecorous, "that it's because their minds are so dark? When you *see*—and *realise*—what they *believe* in their heart of hearts, you know that they are incapable of right thinking." Mr. Jacks had in mind, the reader will perceive, only the patriots of his own age and classroom.

In a moment, Alden had leapt from gloom to hilarity.

"“Oh, dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon!””

he cried. "When all these years they've had our College and our community here, a bright beacon in a naughty world! At the Last Day they won't even *get* into the really *big* sessions! They'll be dismissed in the lower courts; Gabriel or Michael—or even some lesser angel; maybe, as a Saint, I shall have the handling of them myself—will settle their case summarily. "You had Jacks Saheb, and Alden Saheb,

and Douglas Saheb," he will say. "Yet you preferred to keep on with your fooleries, and to die in your sins!" He drew himself up to his height; he was an Archangel dismissing a wretched mob. His arms were tossed out to their fullest width. "Go to Hell, you silly devils!" he shouted. The words opened a flood-gate for something that was straining for expression, and he repeated, with louder emphasis, "Go to Hell!" Then he collapsed in a laugh that confirmed his colleague's fears that his mind, never very stable, was giving way.

If to Jacks he was Puck—and too often Puck who has fallen in with Robin Hood's keg of ale, and liked it—to Mayhew, with whom he found himself often colloguing in these days, he was the brutal redcoat with musket at his shoulder. 'Tell me, you bigoted old diehard, why are we so crass and altogether fat-headed?' he once began.

Mayhew was getting to know his ways, and the long train of seemingly remote conversation that would suddenly explode the mine of what he was really thinking. He was in no way ruffled, and was too wary to show interest.

'In what way do we strike you as crass and fat-headed at present? Alden, I wish I could persuade you to try a peg once in a while.'

'I suppose you think it would give my chatter a semi-coherence that it lacks now?'

'Yes. If anything could.'

'Well, I won't have it. I am now addressing you, not as Charles Mayhew, a humble hand pushing the car of the Lady Britannia, which we see stuck in deep sands. But in your representative capacity, as the Indian Government, particularly on its Law side. Why does this absurd fool of a Government after a murder arrest a whole lot of folk, and then keep them in jail for ages before bringing them to trial?'

'Because it wants evidence.'

'Which it will never get. That answer's too easy. It would be a thousand times better if they hanged a chap quickly, guilty or only doubtfully guilty, and let the rest go. I'm not advocating that, mind! I'm only saying it would do far less mischief than the present kind of futility.'

'That's the first bit of sense I've heard from you since I came to Vishnugram. But I never thought to hear it from you.'

'Mayhew, we neither govern nor misgovern. We're just hanging on, hoping that the Last Trump will sound "Time!" and save us from the bother of making a decision.'

The comparison called to mind his words to Jacks. 'And by this token, O Mayhew Saheb, I *know* that I am going mad. I have an irresistible desire to shock every Englishman I run across.'

'That's no new madness, is it?'

'Yes. It is. For now I notice it, I fight against it. But I am helpless. I have been at special pains, the last few days, not once, but repeatedly, to shock my colleague Brother Jacks. Now it isn't myself that speaks, when I do that, is it?'

### XXX

ON HIS OWN PRIVATE NOTICE-BOARD APPEARED A virulent, ill-spelled attack on 'the white-skinned gods of the College.' When the tint of his skin was flung in his face, he knew how inflamed feelings were. That they escaped the long-drawn-out sullen snarling bitterness which always follows a *hartal* was due to blundering good luck. The students, when they came back, hung about the corridors, with the half-defiant, half-timid, hatred-charged look that he knew too well. 'Their faces sputter,' he once observed to Frances, 'for all the world like a damp match trying to explode.'

A mob had followed him into his office. He was about to fire them, when a student whom he knew dimly, and disliked without having bothered to tell himself so, or to find a reason for dislike, appeared before him, insistent.

'Sir!'

'What is it?'

'I am student of Ronaldshay Hostel. Another student has insulted me.'

'That's no business of mine. Settle it yourselves.'

'Sir, he was abusive with me.'

'You are not babies. In every other country in the world the students settle their private quarrels themselves. In no other country would they ask the authorities to interfere.'

The face hardened in insolence. 'Then, sir, am I to understand that students of College are to suffer insultation, and that Principal will lift no finger to offer redressment?'

A demon of wrath blazed up in Alden's soul, and he fixed the questioner with a look that made him shrink back terrified. Then was it as if a finger were laid on his lips—perhaps grey-eyed Athene plucked him by the cloak (speaking metaphorically, for he had neither cloak nor even coat on), as once Achilles. He said nothing for a moment; possibly because his glance drooped, and fell on the pile of mail which he must somehow get through, possibly because he saw the triviality—in this time when the path of empire was shifting—of any detail which arose in course of the hour-to-hour effort.

When he did speak, he said, very coolly, 'Yes. You are to understand exactly that. Your social life is no business of mine.'

It struck him afterwards that a queer watchfulness encompassed the incident. He ought to have asked himself why the room was so full. But he was too

badgered to ask anything. That he had won a campaign he never guessed, until a week later, when Pramode Babu, his Mathematics Professor, was in his room. Business finished, they were chatting. Pramode asked, 'Sir, do you remember a boy asking you about another boy insulting him?'

Alden racked his memory. 'I seem to remember something of the sort. I refused to interfere, didn't I?'

'Yes. That was all a trap.'

'A trap?'

'The plan was, to make you lose your temper just then, when everyone knew you were pressed with work and full of anxiety. If you had lost your temper and spoken angrily, it would have been in all the papers. There were two reporters from Calcutta at the back of the room.'

'I see. It would have been as it was when Mr. Douglas said, "All right. Go on strike! But you'll all be back in twenty-four hours like dogs with their tails between their legs!" and it was immediately published over the Province that a missionary principal had called his students dogs. But tell me, Pramode Babu, why did they want evidence at all? Why didn't they invent a good whacking, straightforward lie about me, and publish that?'

'Because you are too well known. They wished to get hold of something that people would recognise as likely to have been said by Alden Saheb. You see the

whole Province knows you; and your old students have told many stories about you.'

The incident was valuable, since it recalled him to the incessant need for patience. He banished bad temper as a luxury he could not afford, as many Englishmen have banished it in similar circumstances. Increasingly it seemed to him he was in a false position, that he was wasting his time in a job which was outworn and had become a sham. But he stood for something. He was in the plight of a soldier who sees no reason in remaining where he is, but knows that he was set there; and knows, too, that there is no one to relieve him.

### XXXI

FOR HIMSELF, HE COULD ENDURE; AND DOUGLAS WAS due back in January. What seemed hard was that the Enemy should vex Findlay. Findlay's folk were none too prepossessing to begin with, and it was only on the Christian theory that anyone would have bothered to hold them—

'Since none but I makes much of naught.'

They were neither town nor forest—a people caught on the edges of the jungle, where they lived in scattered villages, with a sprinkling of genuine Bengalis, better educated, better off, beside them. Nationalism, knitting its diverse forces for the double

struggle, first with the alien, then within itself, was reaching out for these folk, whom India had despised from generation to generation. Militant Hinduism, working through the *suddhi* or 'purification' movement, sought to reclaim them before they were lost beyond recovery. As a bribe, it offered what they had never had before, a low but definite place in caste. It sent a missionary to Kanthala, where great activity arose among the Bengalis, hitherto personally friendly to Findlay, and on religious issues ordinarily apathetic. If Hinduism and Islam were presently to come to grips for the governance of India, every head would count; it was as well to gather in the untouchables. They had stout arms, and, if well directed, could be useful in a row.

Robin knew little enough, since John now rarely wrote letters, until the last week of October, when the District Board met, and he was surprised and delighted to find John present. They were both members, but John seldom came. Robin recognised the wisdom of this avoidance, but had not yet brought himself to it. On the last three occasions the Board had met only to disband, a vote to that effect having always been carried in honour of some politician who had had the unsocial taste to die since the previous meeting. However, there was a chance that some time some business *might* get done. Heaven knew, there was enough waiting, with the worst roads in

India and with schools and other public buildings falling to pieces.

Formerly a District Board meeting had served Alden in place of a minor circus or music hall. The comedy had grown monotonous and amused no longer.

To-day there was business, for a change. It was not District Board business. Kshirode Babu, a doctor, rose, his features set sternly, and moved that the Board send the Simon Commission a telegram, breaking the news that they were not going to coöperate with it.

'You sent them that telegram last year,' Alden pointed out. 'And the year before also'.

Kshirode Babu did not seem to think this mattered. Nor did anyone else. As for Findlay, he had let his eyes wander outside, and, so far as he was concerned, had already dismissed the meeting. A glance had persuaded him that it was all illusion—at any rate, it had better be so considered, for our race's credit.

Alden made a further protest. He urged that the Commission had not invited the Vishnugram District Board to coöperate. He threw out the suggestion that they might even not know where Vishnugram was, might not have heard the name.

No one seemed to think this mattered, either. The proposal was carried, and the telegram sent at public expense.

Kshirode Babu next made an exceedingly eloquent speech on the merits of Pramathanath Basu, a local patriot who had died since their last meeting. 'During threescore years he withstood foursquare against petty tyrants of hearth and fields. If such a hero had died in Eengland, he would be received with statue of solid gold in the Westmeenster Abbey. His name shall be eemortal while Eeendians have hearts to fill' (feel). He moved immediate adjournment as a means of signifying respect and regret.

Alden entertained no great respect or regret, having known the deceased as a shifty little fool who had vexed him much in the conduct of College affairs. Nominated, in a misguided moment, to represent the public on the College Board of Trustees, he had been lavish in thinking out and pressing every kind of expense and extravagance (the Mission being understood to be possessed of vast resources in England, which it doled out unwillingly), conservative to a crass degree, and fatuous in support of leniency for every sort of offence. Alden was certain that he had been a main suborner of the President of the Independant Students' Asocciation. However, he had been a College Trustee, and Kshirode had spoken feelingly of his services to higher education. It would seem indecent to protest against paying tribute to so eminent a benefactor.

Nevertheless, Alden, aware of all this, seeing all

this, exploded. 'Hang it all, are we *never* going to do any work?'

'What work, when beloved Motherland is perishing?' asked an owl-faced lawyer reproachfully.

'Roads, hospitals, dispensaries, village schools. Do you mean to say every last thing is to be held up for years, while we turn every gathering into a political scrap? Is the whole country mad? Or is it merely giving a first-rate imitation of madness?'

'We must look on Motherland as second God,' the lawyer pointed out.

'Country is God, country is Mother, country is all in all,' said another patriot reverently.

'Then let's do a bit of honest work for the country,' said Alden. 'Let's begin with that foul cesspit that's been lying since the beginning of things, just outside the Vishnugram hospital.'

'Motherland is starving while we talk,' said the owl-faced lawyer. Alden, eyeing him malignantly, decided that his bushy whiskers made him wombat-faced rather than owl-faced. He would ask Findlay about it afterwards; Findlay's judgment was still sound on these nice distinctions.

Owl-face was staunch; he did not flinch from Alden's glare of disapproval. 'We must do our every hook and crook for Mother's sake,' he said firmly.

After a standing vote taken in silence, the District Board dispersed. Neither Findlay nor Alden rose,

though the latter knew his action would be broadcast over a Province next day, as showing callous contempt for sorrow and disrespect for a dead colleague. Not for the first time he had been manœuvred into a position where whatever he did was wrong and misrepresented him. Fate was daily playing this trick on Englishmen now.

### XXXII

THE MEETING HAD BROKEN UP SOMBRELY AND DISapprovingly, leaving the two friends alone.

'Stay a bit, John', said Alden. 'Sit down. John, do you want a murder done?'

'Murder of whom?'

'Well, I don't care what they do or say to *me*. It's my job, to have these patriots all potting at me. But I can't help worrying over that *suddhi* chap. It's too foul, to have him pestering you. Say the word, and I'll go back with you, and make away with the blighter this evening.'

A smile flickered on John's face, seaming that impassivity which time had strengthend. 'Wouldn't that be giving yourself unnecessary trouble, as well as taking unnecessary risks? The local Musalman community would provide a murderer for a hundred dibs; and do it gladly.'

'You don't get me, Jackadab darling. I want the satisfaction. I grudge any other man having it,

especially the idea of *paying* him for what would give me such pleasure to do myself.'

'I did let it worry me,' said Findlay slowly, 'until I reminded myself that they could do us no real harm. What hurt most was not that I had these *suddhi* folk working among our people, but that it was done in such an underhand way. The chief man in the business, next to the *suddhi* missionary himself, has been Saroj Babu, who used to be a clerk in our dispensary. But the babus have all been in it, of course, though when we meet they try to persuade me that they are on our side, and have no sympathy with this disturbance from outside.'

'Up to date what are your casualties?'

'We have lost three families for certain. Probably another two will go. They are all people who've had as little as possible to do with us for a long time back.'

'It won't do your work a scrap of harm, getting rid of them, if they are the Karikhana folk, as I guess they are.'

'Perhaps not. But the way it's been done has left unpleasantness.'

'I know. It hasn't been discussion of religion, or a straight attempt to bag back for Hinduism those we have got. It's been nothing but an attempt to destroy by any means that are available. Nothing but sheer abuse of you and of your work. Just abuse; and bribery of the beauties who have left you.'

## XXXIII

NEXT WEEK THE 'PUJAS' BEGAN, THE BENGALI EQUIVALENT of the Christmas festival. The College students would give a month up to exploding fire-crackers, feasting, worshipping gorgeously tinselled images and carrying them in procession to the pond where they were flung away, their period of glory over. Robin went to Kanthala, and watched John's vexations at close quarters.

A Hindu *sankirtan* (religious procession) filed its unusual way along the road outside the little jungle church, the first Sunday morning. The shouting and tomtomming were deafening; and the mob was halted outside the church for close on half an hour, striving to enrage Findlay's people, or, failing that, to make worship impossible. Alden's blood boiled. There was an unregenerate self of memory within him that lived on from those first days of his Indian sojourn. Those had been days when the saheb was still a god, most of all in such a place as this jungly Kanthala. A red and wrathful visage at a door would have been enough to scatter an army drunk with patriotic fervour. Why, he remembered how Douglas once—

He had risen, beside himself with anger, not on his behalf but John's, and was making for the door. It would have been futile, in these days of angry and

insolent Nationalism. Worse than futile; the odds were that in another minute he would have been trapped (he who was so wary in his own sphere!) into action that hundreds of witnesses would have twisted and exaggerated out of recognition. Had he but seized by the shoulder that man now with brazen impertinence almost inside their door and leering up at him, it would have become a brutal assault. Had he merely spoken fiercely, there would have been scores ready to testify that they had seen him strike. The odds are that they need not have invented this detail. Alden's temper was quick, and his hands were intended by Nature for action. 'You ought never to hit anybody,' he had once heard Sir Nicholas Headley observe. 'It isn't necessary, and it isn't right. It's every Englishman's job to keep his head. But it's a damned good thing,' the great administrator and philosopher had added musingly, 'to have the reputation of being a man who'll catch a fellow a swipe if he needs it or would get any good from it. And not keep him waiting, either.' Alden had earned this reputation quite early in his missionary career. He might have reinforced it now, if he had not paused to look into John's face.

He hesitated, exasperated and bewildered. In his friend's eyes was neither exasperation nor bewilderment. While he stood, half-defiant, half-ashamed, he found himself listening to a voice which seemed to

have in it all the quietness and certainty that were left in the world.

'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.' The Tent-maker must have spoken that word 'grace' exactly so; Robin remembered how even his proud and lonely spirit—and he was never able quite to forget that he was a gentleman giving away all he had for folk who had no earthly sort of claim upon him and were quite incapable of knowing what they were receiving—seemed always on the edge of breaking down when he remembered that grace. 'Brethren, ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ—how that, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor.' The English had shown India strength, patience, fortitude, fairness. But, for all the magnificent philanthropy of their service, whether in ruling or in preaching, they had not shown overmuch of this. Uneasily and rebelliously, Robin often remembered that his people professed to revere an Asiatic as God tabernacling in mortal body. He was logical, he was always, by principle and by the inescapable habit of his mind, savagely just. He never forgot, even for a moment, that he could not stand for what he did and at the same time keep any pride of race. Yet it rankled, that he must now endure where once he had been set far above the call for endurance.

'All the same,' he said to John afterwards, 'it takes a bit of doing to accept the present state of things'

quietly, when one *knows* how they'd scuttle if we once showed our claws. I remember, my first year out, I came down to Kanthala with Douglas, to stay with Charlie Groves. It was about this time, too. There'd been a poor monsoon, and it was as near to famine without being declared famine, as it could be. The moneylenders, who had got hold of all the wheat, were holding it up for a whacking price. Suddenly the Sonthals all went mad. We had a babu rushing in, and then another, saying, "Oh, sir! These savages are all murdering us!" Douglas took about three swift strides outside (I following him), and we came upon an amazing sight. The Sonthals had all got drunk, and they had burst open Ramsaran Babu's godown, and there they were, man after man of them, ripping open bags of rice with their hands and scattering it to the wind. Douglas stepped up to the nearest of them, and just let out one word of bad Bengali. No, I don't think it was even Bengali. I think what he shouted was "Here!" or, as they pronounce it in Owdham, "'Ere!". It was enough. The chap looked up startled. Only for a second, though. The next, he was legging it across the fields as if the Devil were after him. He wasn't alone, either. Every one of those drunken Sonthals was seized with the one panic. He must run. He didn't know where or why. But he was clear on this point, that running was the thing the best people were all doing. Douglas

stood there, majestic and triumphant, the most overwhelming spectacle since Waterloo. Why didn't you let me do the same, John?"

'Rob, you poor dreamer! You are way back in the Dark Ages that have gone for ever. It wouldn't have happened. You'd only have made fools of us all, and have done it, not before children of Sonthals, but before a pack of lawyers.'

'We've no place here any longer,' said Robin disconsolately.

'What! because a missionary daren't swipe the misguided heathen any more?'

'No. Yes; if you like to put it that way. No, let me put it this way, John. We've tied our own hands by at last remembering what we stand for. And that seems to have waked up a host of foes, visible and invisible. I marvel that we can go quietly past this dingy little Siva-temple behind your bungalow.'

'Why,' laughed John, 'I've known that particular Great God Budh for twenty years. He's a landmark, an old neighbour. I often forget what he stands for, and think of him almost as the chap who lives next to my place!'

'Well, look out, that's all! I tell you, these ancient gods are changing. Over at Vishnugram, they've ceased to be neutral, they are all anti-saheb. Look at me! have I got straws in my hair, or what? For I know I'm going mad. I'll be qualifying to be a

modern poet next, and pretending to believe in any bogies or boggarts that I hear about. I dare bet that if we could go into that den we should see the Great God himself—'

Findlay whistled. 'Siva the Destroyer, the Forgetful, the Lord of the Ten Directions!' he said.

'Oh, no. Not at all. Our local Siva, of course. Some wizened lamp-and-cobweb-blackened little wisp of a gnome. We don't need a bigger god for Kanthala. If you got in there, you'd see him crooning spells against our Mission, and plotting more and better scorpions for that bathroom you won't let us repair, and cobras to lie in wait outside your study. That's about his form.'

Events proved that Alden did the local Siva injustice. He may have been wavering in his long neutrality, but he had not abandoned it, as he showed, a week later. The *suddhi* missionary, having sifted the Christian community painstakingly, decided that he was going to reclaim no one more. So, before departing to another field of labour, he arranged a private recognition service. The ex-Christians were taken into the shrine, as a proof that Hinduism had received its prodigals back generously, not in their old pre-Christian untouchability, but as purified and human. They were allowed to place leaves of *bel* and *tulasi* on the *lingam*, a thing that in their unpurified days they would never have dreamt of as within the

bounds of possibility. Unfortunately, the *suddhi* missionary in his enthusiasm overlooked the resident priest, who was not present and was not consulted beforehand. In the priest's opinion the *thakur* was defiled by the missionary's action, and something had got to be done about it. All the missionary did, however, was to give the priest abuse for abuse, and depart.

'It is an interesting ecclesiastical situation', said Alden. 'Our condition as Christians must indeed be unspeakably foul if, even after purification, our late brethren are still so foul that they are able to contaminate the god himself.' Alden was in the jaundiced mood known to all who have sojourned in India, when the East and all its works become distasteful and repulsive.

Yet the episode cheered him. He returned to the College, comforted for John and for himself.

#### XXXIV

THE CASUAL VISITOR TO INDIA THAT AUTUMN WOULD have been deceived. The weeks slid by so vacantly, he would have thought that minds were vacant also. Everyone remembered that the last meeting of the National Congress, in the preceding December, had applied a jagged shears to the web of Indian politics. They had been cut impatiently across, with a rending

and defiance. Since the tug between Hindus and Muslims was growing ever tenser, and all efforts for peace had failed, recklessness intervened and flung out an ultimatum to the outside power. Within twelve calendar months there must be Dominion status, or else the Congress pledged itself to install chaos.

This threat the Government had met characteristically, by no sign or reply whatever. As the year ran on with perplexing quietness, men's minds endured their puzzlement silently. Was Government going to call the Congress bluff? Was it a bluff? In any case, what could the Congress do, all doctrinaire and windy as it was, and riddled with internal dissensions? All the same, the long-drawn-out squabbling was becoming intolerable. Better an open fight, if no settlement were possible, than this folly of ignoring sedition and trying to govern India by one Commission after another. Why didn't that Simon fellow hurry up?

And then, on the last day of October, came from both Viceroy and Secretary of State the pronouncement that Dominion status was the acknowledged goal, and there would be a Round Table Conference.

The diverse opinions of European India were very fairly represented at the Vishnugram after-tennis talk, to which Mayhew brought a private guest, a young subaltern, Skinner. Hamar was also present,

his Commission having subsided into acknowledged, and not merely actual, coma for a while.

'How'll you ever get these fellows to work together?' the Army man asked. 'They do nothing but cut each other's throats now, when we give them half a chance.'

'That's so,' said Alden. 'But you overlook another fact.'

'What's that?'

'You naturally know all about their cutting each other's throats. The Army has the job of stepping in, and stopping them, from time to time. And I must say,' he added handsomely, 'if ever a rotten job was done with the maximum of possible decency, it's this one. But we who have to live among them realise that they have moods when they feel they'd like to combine for a change, and cut *our* throats.'

'We've never governed since we brought in all this rot about self-government,' Skinner persisted. 'The Government is a Government of sheer funk.'

'I don't think so. I sometimes wonder if it isn't largely just that we've become fed up.'

'Fed up with what?'

'Fed up with the endless abuse and fuss and waste of time, for one thing,' broke in Mayhew. 'I agree with you both.'

'Why, look at the way it's played the deuce at home,' cried the soldier. 'Ever since every Tom,

Dick, and Harry had the vote, we've had nothing but strikes! Half the chaps in England wouldn't *take* work if you went on your bended knees to offer it to them. They prefer to loaf round to football matches, with a fag stuck in their mouths, and to hang out on the dole.'

A fag—or, to use the correct term when it is in use in other than plebeian circles, a cigarette—was very often in Mr. Skinner's mouth. And, though no great performer himself, he was an enthusiastic sports fan. But he was a charming boy, good-natured and willing to please. It was long since Vishnugram had entertained a young man so obviously fitted to carry a lady's racquet or to pull aside a curtain for her. This came on Mrs. Vincent Hamar with the flash of a revelation. But what decided her action, had she analysed it, was the fascination one of Mr. Skinner's gestures had for her. He had a habit, when nervous, of smoothing his moustache, in a way that irresistibly reminded her of Tennyson's line:

‘The rabbit fondles his own harmless face.’

She felt gracious, and in the mood for not too strenuous amusement. She looked across at kindly, easy Mrs. Mayhew, and said: ‘Mrs. Mayhew, you've had Mr. Skinner to yourself for three whole days, to my knowledge. I'm going to be a shameless pirate, and steal him for dinner this evening. Please let me!’

'Why, Mrs. Hamar—' began the pleased and flustered Skinner.

'That's settled, Mr. Skinner. Thank you very much, Mrs. Mayhew. I'm doing it for Vincent's sake. He needs to meet an Army man again. He hasn't had a chance for ages to tell an audience—any audience that will *listen* to him, that is—of how he took Baghdad. To-night my simple hall will rattle to the clank of sabres, while my guest and husband in turn—'

'More likely, both together,' said Alden. 'I know these Army men.'

She accepted the correction. 'Both together

"Shoulder their chairs, and show how fields are won".'

'You ought to talk to a few business men in Calcutta, Skinner,' said Alden. 'Unless this endless wrangle is soon finished, there's going to be no business for anybody in this country. It's the economics of the thing that are working a double conversion, in Indians' brains as well as in ours. Swaraj is all very well; but swaraj without anything to eat—or (as a Calcutta Parsi put it to me) "in my case, without half a dozen motor-cars and a few other necessities, is going to be damned cheap proposition".'

'I'm often sorry,' said Hamar, 'that I chose the judicial side.'

'Why?' asked Skinner.

'Because that's the side where they can do without us most easily.'

'Don't you think, then, that these people need to have a few folk who keep the ideals of British justice and fair play before them?' asked Skinner, making quite an elaborate speech. He blushed at his own eloquence and temerity; and the hand went up to his face.

He did not seem to strike an answering chord in anyone. Mayhew throughout hardly troubled himself to attend to the discussion; his own views were formed, and he regarded them as sound. But Hamar, who was to be Skinner's host, laid himself out to talk. 'You see, Skinner, if you are doling out British justice and fair play—I think those were the articles you mentioned,—you soon cease to be anything like sure that you are providing the genuine goods. Any reasonably competent Indian can beat you hollow if he wants.'

'If he *wants*,' agreed Mayhew.

'Ah!' said Skinner. His mind was far from clear, however. He had strayed into a field beyond the well-marked paths of his own experience.

'I grant you that,' said Hamar. 'But take one of the better-governed Native States. *We* have to go by the evidence. *They* go by the *facts*—which means, they often go dead against the evidence. I often

want to do the same, but I daren't. Look at what happened in my court last week. I had an obvious rogue up, and I asked one of my Assessors his opinion. "Sir," he said, "he is a guilty one." "What makes you think so?" I asked him. "Look at his face!" he replied. A damned good argument, too. But there wasn't any *evidence*—that we should call evidence—'

'It was good enough *prima-facie* evidence,' Alden interrupted punningly.

'So I had to act accordingly,' Hamar concluded.  
'I've just had a lovely argument in my Christian hostel,' said Alden. 'A boy was accused of pinching from another boy's box, and he fiercely denied it. As a matter of fact, there's no doubt that he was guilty. But I couldn't openly espouse my Hostel Superintendent's reasoning, though it struck me as remarkably sound. "If you are not guilty," he said, in a beautiful patient way he has, "how is that you are accused? This charge has not been brought against Shomuel or Jackob or Johon<sup>1</sup>. Why? Because they are innocent. But is brought against you—and you only. Because you are guilty. If you were not guilty, it would not have been brought".'

Hamar summed up. 'I've no doubt that a few *comparatively* innocent people go to quod on my say-so, and a whole flock of the guilty go free. However,

<sup>1</sup> Samuel or Jacob or John.

what does it matter? Oh, what the devil does it matter? Yes, Mayhew, I will have another peg. Thank you.'

'And you say that doesn't matter!' said his wife. 'Robin! did *you* ever harbour such cynicism?'

'Why, no', said Robin. 'But I see Vincent's point. He argues that there's something that is wiser than any single mind, namely, the collective opinion and experience of every mind. We call that *Society*. Society—for reasons which are hidden too far back in the Dark Ages for us to rediscover; but they are *there*, and they must have been all right—has decided that at any given time a certain proportion of the populace should be in quod. Now, Vincent knows he can't find out the facts, in more than a small number of cases. But the prisons exist, they are kept up by good Government money—the starving ryots' money, in fact. They have got to be used. Therefore—'

'That's enough,' said Hilda. 'I might have known who was the serpent that had poisoned my husband's once comparatively guileless mind.'

During the past year, Mr. Augustus Skinner has done very well in his profession. In January, 1930, he became engaged to the daughter of Major Erskine-Smythe, the well-known big game shot; and, three months later, he passed his First Hindustani Examination. But he gets his niche here, not for any one of

these greater feats, but solely because of a remark to Mrs. Hamar at dinner.

'I'll tell you where I've come across Vishnugram before, Mrs. Hamar. In our regimental mess we have pictures of the old buffers who were in command before our present man. There's one with face all bushed up with side-whiskers that look like those turned-up Turkish swords, a Colonel McLamont. He commanded the battalion all through the Maratha Wars, ages ago. And under his portrait it says: "Retired, 1808. Died at Vishnugram, Bengal, date unknown".'

The interest this statement excited left nothing to be desired.

'Are you sure of the name, Mr. Skinner?' his hostess asked.

'Certain, Mrs. Hamar. Lieutenant-Colonel Clement McLamont. Raymond—that's my company commander; he's rather a funny dog—says he thinks it was the old boy's name that drove him into the jungles. He says it sounds like a fellow falling over his own skates.'

'He's our local ghost', Hilda explained. 'He died in a nook tucked away under some hills that begin about eight miles from here. I'm going to introduce myself to him the very first minute I can make time for the trip.'

## XXXV

THE SUMMER OVER, VINCENT'S COMMISSION REVIVED, and again often took him away.

One morning in late October, Hilda and Frankie, riding together, came upon women gathering marsh-flowers in the wet edging of the Red Tank; and, with such vernacular as they could command, failed to find that there was any useful purpose in the action. The women seemed restive at being held up; while being questioned, they kept a close look-out on the water, that had no easily determined borders but seeped up into the solid land. The sisters picked up nothing but the word *Iti*, to them meaningless, given with much repetition. They had moved on, when they were enlightened as to the queer watchfulness. Frankie's mount, a flighty stud-bred that Hilda had bought at the Sompur *mela*<sup>1</sup> and most inappropriately and irreverently named Lord Curzon, cocked a suspicious eye at the muzzle of a nearly submerged log. Rustum also seemed to think it worthy of scrutiny. There appeared nothing to warrant such observance, till Frankie noted a half-hid circle that contained a leaden semblance of intelligence. She raised her arm to point this out; the log, finding itself detected, sank out of sight.

'You've solved an old problem', Robin told them.

<sup>1</sup> Fair.

'The people are right, after all, in maintaining that some of the old Rajas' muggers still infest the Red Tank. Probably only an odd survivor, or perhaps a couple. You don't hear the story often enough, for it to be any more'.

'Where have the rest gone?' Frankie asked.

'Trekked across country to other lakes and rivers, when food got too scarce. The ones still there must be hard put to it to get rations. Though I don't suppose an occasional goat is hard to capture. It's lucky there were two of you, and that you didn't go too near.'

'Why, could anything have happened, so long as we didn't actually go in the water?' asked Hilda.

'Could it? There could have been a sudden rush out on to land, and a swinging blow from the crocodile's tail, enough to knock anything off its feet. If I were you, Hilda, I wouldn't cross any watercourses that connect up with the Red Tank.'

'But I've crossed them for years.'

'Yes. But, you see, you didn't know. You do now. You ladies are to be congratulated on having collected exact and scientific knowledge, where we had only legend before.'

They asked about the women; and about *Iti*.

'They were gathering the wild plants of the wet land where the rice grows. These signify the natural fertility of the ground. They keep them in their houses over the Kartik *puja*—Kartik is the God of War, and

a very virile, vigorous, splendid fellow. That's all I ever found out, and it's more than any book can tell you. The men say what they always say when you ask them about religion, that the women know and that it is a women's business. In this case, they're right.'

'The women also said something about Lakshmi,' Frances told him.

'Oh, yes? Then, evidently, the Brahmins are trying to link it up with some goddess in the orthodox pantheon—Lakshmi, the Household Goddess, for choice. But it's as old as the hills and the marshes. Iti they call the worship here, Itu in Western India, apparently—feminine here, masculine or neuter there. The whole country swarms with these unrecognised godlings. We have Padalsini out Findlay's way; there's the locally powerful *thakur* who harboured the leopard that gave Hilda's pony such a scare; there's the infinitely ancient gentleman who lives on the top of Trisunia. Not that Iti is to be lumped with this obscure crowd. She's a deity at home all over India, once you get off the beaten track, and shifting her sex as the very greatest of the really Great Gods ought to do.'

'We haven't paid one-tenth enough attention to these vernacular things,' he concluded. 'Left to ourselves, we might have done. But the Germans have taken too much interest in Indian thought; and they are better scholars than we are, they are philosophers and men of method, they like to

have everything clear and generalised, they hate a science that's untidy and in shirt-sleeves and those often torn ones. The result is, the whole world is befuddled with the belief that a country as big and as varied as Europe less Russia has just one line of thought, which was fixed long ago. Thank me for this excellent lecture! I deserve it. God forgive us!' he added, jerking off, as was his wont, into another side-track of his theme, 'for having encouraged all those Western Orientalists. For, left to ourselves, we knew better, being ourselves a casual people, and accustomed to having notions that slopped over and made great irregular marshes. No one has ever mapped and charted our different British fairy mythologies, for instance. And now we have deeply wounded the monstrous regiment of *bhuts*, by our neglect of them. I shouldn't be surprised if in the silence of the midnight Iti and Padalsini and the rest are met in grimdest conclave, plotting our overthrow. And they've got a sight more power, if they once put out those earth-bound and tree-bound hairy hands of theirs, than any of the Gods who have Vedic hymns extant in their honour. There's Mother Ganges, another of their order, and one who has managed to get into the best recognised circles, instead of having to skulk in the jungly background. Though she's still, I suspect, more at home with the outlaw and outcast deities. And here we find her

mugger—her own private river hack—lying snug in an inland swamp, and eyeing malevolently two English ladies. What's he doing there, when his place is the broad spreading Ganges? Marry, he was *sent!*"

But Robin had not done. 'On a point of fact', he added, 'and to be pedantic—if you two haven't long ago ceased to listen—there is some controversy as to what Mother Ganges' mount really is. The pictures show it as a general and catholic mix-up of the mugger, the ghurial or long-snouted crocodile, and our river-shark—the which is by naturalists entitled *Carchareus gangeticus*.'

'I am glad to know all this,' said Hilda.

'Continue to be glad,' he exhorted her. 'For knowledge is its own exceeding great reward, Providence having appointed no other reward for it. And there be few that have a superfluity of it. For myself, if to-day, after over twenty years wasted in what Government wittily calls Education, I do not go about with straws in my hair, and if I can still conduct a conversation consecutively—'

'But that's just what you don't do often, Robin,' his wife objected.

'If I am still numbered among the comparatively sane,' he said, ignoring her words, 'it is for two reasons: because I have spent in the jungles every minute I could, and because I have interested myself in the quaint and often very engaging beliefs of the heathen.'

## XXXVI

ALDEN HAD DROPPED IN AT HAMAR'S OFFICE, ONE HOT forenoon. They were by an open window, when a dispirited keen came up from the road. Hamar's face set 'bull-fashion', in the expression that had first made Hilda set him apart from other men, then relaxed into a grim smile.

'If you care to talk rank sedition for ten minutes, Rob, I shan't mind. If anyone wants to maintain that we have given this country the silliest Government the world has ever seen, I don't see how he can be proved wrong.'

It was within a week of Durbar Day, the annual 'holiday' that keeps green the memory of the King-Emperor's visit in 1911. On the Day itself Loyalty would be inculcated on the youth of the land, by arduous revels; in preparation for these, the Zila School was filing along the roads, singing the British National Anthem. Bengal, like Gideon's Palestine, has its sibboleth and shibboleth divisions; and Vishnugram is in West Bengal, where every *s* is *sh*. Accordingly, that lugubrious chant was praying that God would Shave the King.

Alden's return smile was also grim. 'Last week I had to attend a school show in a jungly hamlet, where a lot of underfed, undersized kids had been taught to sing "Britannia Rule the Waves!"' It struck

me as pathetic, even amid the colossal beano of it all. The Headmaster thought he would bring smiles to the iron cheek of Authority, by thus inculcating affection for his alien rulers, and peradventure get a three rupee rise in salary.'

The word 'affection' reminded Hamar of a once-famous dictum of the judge of a 'sedition' case. What, the counsel for the defence had urged, was *disaffection*? His client was charged with disaffection. But did anyone know what disaffection was? Here the judge had boiled over with indignation. 'Want of affection is disaffection,' he rapped out. Hamar thought the definition now appropriate.

Both looked out pityingly on the absurd procession. 'And on the Day itself,' Alden musingly reminded Hamar, 'those wretched kids who are now shambling along in the dust will have to assemble long before the usual school time, to sing this request, of which they are long ago sick to death, that the Almighty would be pleased to shave His Majesty. Then they'll listen to speeches from the Headmaster about *loyalty*, and a Sanskrit dirge intoned by the Head Pundit. In the afternoon will be compulsory sports; and the evening will close with a compulsory football match among themselves—I have flatly declined to let our boys take them on. They'll be too dead tired to be anything but easy meat. And they haven't done with the Day even when it's over. Its ghost will

haunt them for a week to come, while they write essays on "How I Spent Durbar Day". And the Head will send up a long fulsome report to the Education Department. Every year since 1911 we have had the same rot sent us by the Department. And then they say that the Government of India can't be made any cheaper! First, that they *sanction*—mark the word!—an expenditure (from *our* funds, of course!) of *not more than* so many hundred rupees on fireworks, etc. Then, more tosh of the same quality. Then, after the Day, a request for an account of *how* our school spent Durbar Day, and of what was done to inculcate loyalty and good citizenship, etc. And every year they have received the same reply: "The students were given a whole holiday". Just the one sentence.'

### XXXVII

UNEXPECTEDLY THE LEOPARD RETURNED. HE MUST have remembered the Vishnugram cows, and the ease with which they were slaughtered. At any rate, in January he recurred.

It was getting on to midnight; Alden was lying in bed, on a veranda, trying to sleep. Absolute silence had succeeded to the jackals' yellings, and nothing seemed to be stirring. It was now that there came from the main road skirting the College grounds an

intricate howl that made him spring to a sitting position. After an interval, the howl was repeated. There could be no doubt as to what it was. It was the *pheeal*,<sup>1</sup> and could mean only one thing. One of the larger beasts of prey was patrolling the road, less than four hundred yards away.

Nineteen years before, Robin had first heard that cry. And, eighteen years before, he had been on this same veranda, with Douglas on the veranda at the other side of the house; the cry had come again, exactly as now, except that he had been playing under the mosquito net with a pile of examination papers, trying to correct a few before he dropped asleep. Douglas had come and stood there, peering into the blackness.

Douglas had said, 'Alden, do you know what that is?'

'Yes', Robin had answered. 'It's the *pheeal*. There's a *bagh* loose on that road somewhere.'

Douglas had gone off, and he had heard him loading a gun. He remembered how this had made him unhappier than even the leopard's proximity. Douglas was casual about loaded guns. Ever since he had shot the local doctor, in his first year, he had been less popular as a member of a shooting party than in any other capacity. Moreover, he had a bearer with an intense curiosity about guns, and

<sup>1</sup> A jackal that gives warning.

itching fingers. Guns went off with disturbing frequency in his rooms, which was bad for nerves unless they belonged to him. Robin had never discovered anything that troubled Douglas's nerves.

Part of that eighteen years' old incident—which came back to him so vividly now, as if the years between were a dream, dispelled by this awakening—was re-enacted. His wife appeared under the drawn-back curtain of her room.

'Robin! haven't you been asleep yet?'

'No.'

'Didn't you hear a noise?'

'Yes. It's the *pheeal*.'

The next night, Alden slept in a room on the ground floor of one of his hostels. The Indian superintendent was ill, and had gone home. Since the 'murderers' affair, there was a new nervousness in the students; and, with the *bagh* back, they were not willing to be left alone, even if there had not been excellent reasons why someone responsible should be on the spot, to see that they all spent the night there, and not in the bazaar.

As it drew towards half-past ten, Alden heard a sound—*woof, woof*, coming at regular intervals. He listened, his heart listening too. The leopard was pacing the winding path beneath his window, turning his head from side to side with a noise that was a semi-grunt, semi-growl.

After he had passed, Alden rose, and cycled, pyjamaed, to his bungalow. It was pitchy blackness; but, even if this had not been a garden road, no one ever dreamed of bothering to have a lighted lamp when cycling. Laws, like nice customs, curtsy to great kings; Alden still assumed himself a great king in Vishnugram, though the saheb's day had finished with the War. Cycling to-night, however, he felt queerly. There were fair odds (as he observed afterwards) that he might 'butt into a perambulating panther.'

He found wife and child asleep. Therefore (thank-ing the gods that it was early spring, a cool late-January night—and not the stifling later season) he closed the glass doors gently. Before going, however, he hesitated; then decided it was wise to let Frankie know what he had done. He waked her, and told her.

Returned to his bed, he could not sleep; he lay awake, wondering and imagining. Where was Brother Bagh now? Towards one o'clock he heard that *woof, woof* again. The leopard had completed his round, and was repeating it. Evidently all the Vishnugram kine and goats were well indoors.

This time Alden was determined to see his disturber. Springing out of bed, he stood by the electric switch; it remained only to choose his moment exactly. The *woof, woof* was right beneath his window, when he touched the switch. And the light caught the beast

square, causing him to blink. Then he humped himself in one leap up the further bank, and disappeared with a growl, into the deeper darkness of the Lakshmi-haunted banyan. He had vanished, thought Robin, to the tree-queen's protection.

Being a coward (as he explained afterwards) Robin shut every door and window carefully. Then he fell asleep.

### XXXVIII

NEXT DAY, PUGS WERE OBVIOUS NOT ONLY OUTSIDE Alden's bungalow, but outside Douglas's and Hamar's and Mayhew's. At tennis a punitive expedition was projected; it was only a matter of time and everyone's convenience. Only Alden, to whom the sojourner brought a joyous breath of the wild, was rebellious.

'Why do you want to kill one of God's creatures?' he asked.

'He's not going to stay with us on a vegetarian diet,' said Hamar. 'My cook came to me this morning with folded palms, and begged me to protect his only cow.'

'His only cow! I know your cook. And I know his cow. It's that huge yellow villain that finished off Hilda's peas last cold weather, just when they were flowering.'

This was a crafty stroke, calculated to turn Hamar's flank, by enticing his wife over. It nearly succeeded;

the peas and their slaughter were a rankling grievance. Hilda knit her brows.

'Are you *sure*, Robin? Paran denied that his cow had anything to do with it.'

'Sure?' replied Robin. 'I saw the brute with my own eyes; I was cycling by that very morning. It wasn't an accident, either. Its master had expressly brought it for the purpose, for it had a long rope attached. He waited until he had seen you two ride out of the compound, and then he deliberately thrust in this living sickle to the harvest of your peas. It was the Abomination spoken of by the Prophet Daniel, standing where it ought not.'

'Did you *see* the cow in my peas? For, if you did, it was an unneighbourly act to let it stop there, Robin.'

'No, of course I didn't see it there. I'd have turned it out if I had. But I did see it standing by the cook's godown, waiting to be put into pasture. I meant to tell you, but it clean slipped my memory, with another of these infernal strikes being suddenly called the very next day. If the *bagh* is going to extirpate this tawny horror, and others of its sort, he's entitled to our humble thanks. We ought to stroke him, and make much of him, instead of plotting his assassination. I'm all agin it, gentlemen.'

His fellow-conspirators disagreed. Mayhew, who held, as would any saheb except a notorious semi-imbecile like Alden, that the world was divided into

creatures shootable and creatures unshootable, the leopard ranking high and obviously in the former category, did not trouble to argue. The leopard was a leopard, and therefore to be bagged. Hamar, who was lukewarm on the shooting, thought the cow aspect still worth urging. They were there as protectors of the poor; the poor possessed cows.

'I know, I know,' said Alden. 'The cow is a poem of pity, says Brother Gandhi. The worship of the cow is Hinduism's greatest contribution to civilisation. All I can say is, I am definitely outside civilisation in this matter. I disagree with the Saint *in toto*. I haven't seen a cow that wasn't an eyesore, for ages. I look on the leopard as *sent*. God forbid,' he added piously, 'that we should manhandle a heavenly messenger, or in any way ruffle his feelings. What is India's greatest need to-day? More leopards. And what does this bureaucratic, oppressive, heartless Government do about it? Nothing. No, worse than nothing. It actually offers a bounty for every slain *bagh*. It's a shame—the worst kind of shame, an economic shame. Much worse than the Salt Tax. I'm changing my views fast,' he concluded. 'I'm beginning to see that all this chatter about Dominion status and gradual, peaceful progression to self-determination is rot.'

'Hear! hear!' said Mayhew.

'The only thing that'll set India right is Red Revolution. She has a right to have it. Every other country

has had it. She *ought* to have it. It's the only thing that can clean her up as she needs to be cleaned up. What's the use of a few Hindu-Moslem riots, and the sacrificing of a few cows annually? What I want to see is millions of cows done in.'

'Would you like to see leopards and lions increasing wholesale?' asked Hilda, moved by his eloquence but nevertheless feeling she had a duty, as the protectress of the lowly.

'Yes. I would.' He turned reproachful eyes on her. 'It's this infernal grande-dameish attitude that you brought from Somerset that prevents you from being a realist, Hilda. You think it's your business to see that the coals and blankets are adequately distributed; and in return you accept the salaams of the poor. Your wife's riddled with sentiment, Hamar. If the poor had an abundance of *bags*, they wouldn't *need* coals and blankets; they'd be self-supporting.'

'And where would my salaams come from?' asked Hilda.

'All my life,' said Robin, ignoring this pertinent question, 'I have longed to see

"These blessed creatures, and to hear the call  
They to each other make."

'My missionary career has been one long failure. I have been out in India twenty years, and have never

met a tiger on his native heath. Leopards, yes. Bears, once. Wild pig and wolves, often. But not a single tiger. And look at the way our jungles have changed. When I first came out to India, you could see herds of black buck from the train, every time you crossed Central India. You are lucky now if you see one. I used to see hares every time I went in our jungles here. I never see them now. If the sahebs and numerous babus who have guns do not kill them, they get caught in those nooses that the village people set across their runs. What rubbish the whole Indian controversy is! No one ever gets on to India's *real* needs. At the Round Table Conference, whenever it's held, they'll talk about everything else—Viceroy's power of veto, proportional representation, even votes for women. But I'll bet any one of you anything you like that no one, not even an Indian Prince, has the sense to point out that what India needs is lashings of wild beasts of the fiercer sorts, with a free hand for ten years.'

'A free paw and maw, you mean,' said Hilda.

'Well,' said Mayhew, 'I can't join in any shoot for a day or two. I've got to go out Ranibund way. But I could join you, Friday. What about that?'

Hamar thought. 'Righto. That would be a good time. There's a bit of moon early on.'

## XXXIX

THE LEOPARD, HOWEVER, ANTICIPATED HIS DATE OF doom, by a deed which forfeited even Robin's courageous advocacy. The very night after the foregoing discussion, Hamar was aroused by a stamping and plunging in his stables. Picking up a torch and a revolver, he ran out. The confusion was growing; both horses were mad with terror. Arrived at their stalls, he could see that a dark shadow, tossed yet clinging, was on Rustum's shoulder. He took a shot. The shadow dropped, and then rushed by him. Blood-spots were found next morning, outside the stable and not merely mixed with Rustum's.

It was long before Rustum, the horse attacked, quieted down enough to be handled. Vincent found Hilda at his side, carrying a hurricane lantern. The noise had waked her also, and brought her out. When she saw what had happened—the shoulder ripped and jagged into deep raw furrows—her mind set hard in anger and indignation. All they could do was to wash the wounds, and bind them up.

Rustum's after-history was brief. He was not ridden again, and was kept under observation, apart by himself. He seemed to go on quietly, and the wounds to be healing, until a fortnight later, when he broke into a convulsion and died in fifteen minutes.

Meanwhile, his mistress raged with her picture of

the assault out of darkness, and of the leopard clinging there, with his jaws buried in the horse's veins. A leopard was a leopard, pleasant to the mind in his place, which was in the lonely wastes; in the scale of beauty she ranked Rustum higher, however graceful a leopard might be. Moreover, there was still a horse undamaged in the stables, as well as Rustum to invite the leopard to return to his half-accomplished kill. An immediate punitive party was improvised, of Hamar, Alden, and Jacks.

They should have met at Hamar's stables. But Hilda had arranged to have a fire and watchmen there; she refused to expose the horses again to attack. The leopard was known to have a regular beat, which took him past Alden's an hour earlier, as a rule, than he reached Hamar's. A goat was purchased, and tied under one of the College jack-trees, in whose boughs Alden fixed an electric light. The idea was that, when the leopard was engrossed, with his mouth plunged greedily into the decoy's throat, the light would be switched on; and in that moment of blindness, as he faced the flood of brightness, he would be bagged from Alden's roof.

The plan fell through from the leopard's failure to coöperate. It was still dusk when a clamour arose from the police lines. The three next day heard that without waiting for night the enemy had come boldly for a cow tethered there. The noise (if it were true

that he really came) seemed to catch him with his nerves below normal, for it frightened him off any further action. The dark hours flowed away untroubled, except by Mr. Jacks, who sat in a tense and elaborate stillness, at every rustle loudly ingeminating 'Hush!' He rebuked with especial wrath a flying fox, as it creaked leathern-wingedly past him. The goat, as a goat, was unsatisfactory. It emitted two perfunctory bleats; and then lay down, and was the only one to enjoy a good night. Alden, characteristically impatient, wanted to rouse it with pebbles. But, every time he made the suggestion, Jacks fiercely whispered that he heard the leopard coming. Three men, therefore, made fools of themselves, sitting all night on a bungalow roof, with rifles trained on a goat peacefully slumbering in shade of a tree. There was one occasion, late in the small hours, when it was free to those who had faith, to maintain that the leopard really came. It remained a point of schism between the three; Jacks was certain, Alden doubtful, Hamar an open scoffer. Alden had turned over in an uneasy cat-nap, troubled by mosquitoes, when Jacks hissed at him for causing such a disturbance. Alden rubbed his eyes. It was then that Jacks quivered with excitement, and whispered, 'There! there!' Alden prematurely switched on the light. Jacks fired—and shattered the bulb. Hamar arose, and impartially cursed them both. They still hung

on, despite the broken bulb, in the consideration that it would presently be light enough to see. At any rate, there was a goat there; and the leopard *might* be prowling in the offing.

This was the last that Vishnugram saw or heard of the leopard. When a week had passed leopardless, he was being forgotten. You may watch all night for a leopard. But not all your life.

#### XL

HIS LAST APPEARANCE OF ALL WAS DOUBTFULLY canonical, resting on Alden's surmise.

With Rustum out of action, Hilda remembered having seen Monsoon Cloud sometimes being towed along the roads by an uninterested sweeper. She had a watch kept for him, and he was deflected into her compound one morning. The Sack had not dared to back him since the day of the borrowing; and, as Vincent pointed out, he had gone pretty soft. But he was the same spirited little thing, that would quickly harden. She bought him, an easy transaction.

Three weeks later, he took her to Bhagabund. Vincent was away; she was to dine with the Aldens, and had all the time in the world. So, after chatting with her folk, she pushed her Furthest North a mile further, not to waste the inviting strip of down. It finished abruptly, above a pattern of brooks, a deep

sandy inset of the valley. She could see their local ghost's abode, a banyan grove fitted neatly into a niche of the higher hills. The time seemed ripe for a visit.

The pony scrummaged gamely through sands and morasses; chose to canter up a longish slope, steep enough for his quarters to seem absurdly low, tucked under to kick away the scattering earth 'as if he were an out-size in rabbits bucking strenuously forward' (Hilda afterwards); climbed a series of terraces like stairs; and brought her to her goal. The hills stepped down suddenly to this last plateau, which was filled with a mighty darkness, in its front two uplifted trunks —like Samson's arms groping for the columns of the mountains, to pull them on to the plain. Before the trees—tree, rather, for it was all one aggregation—was a small grassy square. Here was the grave—a headstone and a tiny whitewashed shrine, with a lamp burning under a wooden projection. Hilda was riding up to investigate, when an unkempt being, all elf-locks and ashes, casteless, ageless, a creature half priest, half Sonthal, carrying an ancient matchlock, rose like an exhalation from some unseen hiding-place, and warned her off. She kept her distance, almost on the crumbling rim of this final, steepest ridge, and asked haughtily, not for the sake of getting knowledge, but to establish a correct status of superiority, 'Of what *devata* is this the shrine?'

'Klemmon Saheb,' the exhalation told her.

The God Siva, questioned on a lonely heath at dusk, declared himself a Banerjee; you could hardly expect a Banerjee to fear to approach his shrines. Hilda would have explained to this fool fanatic, who waved her away, that his deity was her own countryman. But the horse, so willing hitherto, refused closer neighbourhood. His mistress had no mind to have come all this way, to be cast for a fool's part at the end; and a sultry cloud swam into her own, when she met those burning eyes, exultant, sardonic, watching her frustration. She could be quick-tempered as a bee; she meant to get up to the shrine, and she plied a riding-switch, with brisk, swift sincerity. But, with ears laid back and frightened wickers, the pony made it plain that he would not be hustled forward by punishment. 'He was not worried about me. In fact, he didn't give a bean what I did or wanted. The non-violent non-coöperation movement had gone below even your *bhuts*, Robin. Most *uncivil* disobedience, it seemed to me.' Fuming and helpless, she waited—on the edge of what *looked* like a leaning wall, a place where the most imperious vexation must compromise.

And, as she waited, from long hidden strata of the mind footsteps began to climb. Listen! Those voices are the trolls, enemies of mankind ever, plotting in their caverns. That thunder was of a stone dislodged by no human tread. She imagined a parody of the

Balaam story—a stiff-cravatted, testy ghost, holding his grave against all comers, visible to all but herself. Perhaps she had behaved as unjustifiably as the prophet? At least she had had to endure seeing a witness of her discomfiture. Nor had he been affronted by a threateningly-clutched weapon, capping annoyance with the last unbearable provocation. And the story makes it clear that the prophet was a meeker person than Hilda.

'It was an unmannerly spook,' she observed to Robin, 'for a British one, that refused to let a lady approach his shrine. And his time was the Regency, wasn't it—the time of Lord Byron and all the Bucks? My countrymen have usually treated me better.'

Robin, following her story with a troubled interest that had roots beyond the obvious ones that she saw, did not question this.

'But perhaps he knew only adventuresses, and women who did not insist on a proper respect. So, to show him that my pride was very deeply offended, and that "I am va-astly displeased with you, sir," I made him a reverence, as lowly and elaborate as I could manage. This way, Frankie.'

While Hilda was rebuking the Dead, the shrine's guardian was out of sight. Suddenly he reappeared, draped in a leopard's skin, 'its head coyly resting on his shoulder, the paws tied together in a grotesque embrace of his neck. Full in my face I caught a horrid whiff—'

'The skin had been newly stripped and wasn't properly cured.'

'I suppose that was it.'

'You can hardly blame the horse for jibbing!'

'I see that now. But in the heat of the engagement I considered him guilty of a particularly vexing misdemeanour, in thinking the enemy so much more important than myself. It was most disrespectful to his rider.'

'You may be glad that he did. That gun—'

'It was only a rusty old thing, Robin.'

'I daresay. But it could have brained you, or stunned the pony—'

'Gramercy for the flattering difference, brother-in-law!' And Hilda, who chose to think herself back in George the Third's reign, rewarded him with a friendlier repetition of the sweeping salutation that she had given the ghost.

'Have stunned one of you, anyway, if you'd gone up to the fellow. If I know his sort, he would be pretty thoroughly drugged, and out of touch with nice ethical distinctions.'

'I knew I kept a handkerchief somewhere. I was fumbling for it. And in the same revulsion I threw my head up; it was absolutely more than I could stand. Monsoon Cloud did the same; and I suppose there was a moment of breakdown, of nerveless fingers and wandering attention, for he got his wish,

and had spun round like a top. But not before I *saw* Klemmon Saheb's face, coarser and ruddier than I had dreamed even a colonel's face could be, on a background of red berries, like a Bacchus niched (is there such a word, Robin?) in half-ripe purple grapes.'

In the very moment of explication, the supernatural had returned. As she was hurried away, her thoughts were relief; horror of the shrine and its guardian; a dread to search the grove on foot, as she had half-planned, with the pony tied up where he could not smell that inadequately slain leopard, but also where she could not keep a watch on him. Anything might happen, any mischief emerge from that blackness, filled with those insolent eyes.

Yet it was thought of those eyes that restored her determination. She was ill content that they should have seen her scurrying down the slope, as if they had imposed fear on her. She drew rein—hesitated—went on—drew rein once more—dismounted for greater freedom of person—and, like Clive before Plassey, waited in a mango-copse, thinking. And she saw how absurd it was to see a ghost in daylight; and still surdler to be put to flight by one. She was here, and ought to investigate further, and find a reason for this second impossibility, as she had found a reason for the first. When she next came, the atmospheric condition—or whatever it was—that had conjured out of air that rubicund, bushy visage might

not obtain. Or there must be some queer configuration of tree or massing of leaves, some trickery somewhere, of Nature or man.

She decided to return.

'Monsoon Cloud performed as if he hoped to make progress in several directions at once. I knew that he guessed I wasn't an awful lot keener on going back than he was, and that he thought I was mad and that someone else ought to take charge. His mind was moving towards nominating himself for the job. So I was as watchful as a cat with a mouse that's planning to escape, and had made up my mind that I would rigorously discourage symptoms of disaffection or ill-timed frivolity. Suddenly he planted both feet as if caught in glue, and dropped his head to examine a mimosa. I know I came close enough to his eyes to notice how unnaturally bulging they were. If that had been all, the proceedings would have terminated happily enough. But, just as I was asking frostily what he meant by it, and was about to point out that a *babla*, though a beautiful object in itself, was not sufficiently interesting for us to stop our journey there, some person or persons unknown—'

'Unknown, Hilda?'

'Unperceived. Threw a leopard-skin. Like this, Robin.' She illustrated with a mat. 'I am not clear as to what my colleague did next. But he was going home—without me. I heard him making good time

across the next level; and the next after that. It was a sound programme. But not the one I had passed.'

'The leopard-skin?' asked Robin.

'Oh, *that* had disappeared, I never noticed how. I was never so neatly decanted from a saddle before. Nothing spilled except my temper.'

'I'm glad Vincent is away.'

'My first reflection, even while I was semi-somersaulting to Mother Earth; and my only comfort, in the trying moments that followed, apart from the thought that neither the pony nor I was to blame for what had happened. I soon realised that those uplands promised to become pretty tiring, even without the bogs and sands to follow. I found myself living over again former experiences of trying to coax a horse to wait while I pussy-footed up to him, all the time pretending that I wasn't really deeply interested, instead of sidling round hedges and places where I wasn't. But I had no expectation of enjoying even this exhausting but not altogether hopeless form of exercise this time. I had witnessed my late partner's complete disappearance. And had ten good miles of perfectly beastly country ahead of me.'

Hilda was nothing if not dramatic; and her face re-enacted her annoyance and despair.

She went on. 'But the President of the *bhuts* had nearly finished his sport with Hilda. Dishevelled,

funky, nervous'—she stopped, seeking for more adjectives—‘sulky, furious, disgusted, laughing—’

‘All that?’ queried Robin.

‘Well, not *very* dishevelled, except that I had taken my hat off, and there was a bit of a breeze. I had scrambled down a few terraces, and was negotiating another, when I saw—and could hardly trust my eyes, least of all in that demon-haunted region—my serviceable little garron halted. It was too much to suppose that he had realized how bitterly I had been regretting him. It seemed plainly illusion, one last and cruellest trick of all. I subsided as if I were a shadow—afraid to breathe, lest the vision break up and go. I sat there, entranced—a woman in a dream, playing with the thought of renewing our old relationship.’

The recollection flitted through her eyes.

‘But I saw that something had got to be done; the sun was setting in a rift of the leagues of jungle between me and home. I had vague notions of a flanking movement. No! I couldn’t see how it was possible. He was at the end of a long slope, that was free from shadow or ambush or red-cheeked spectres or leopard-skins fluttering out. I got up, as unobtrusively as I had dropped, and had taken about five steps that I hoped were a good imitation of a statue walking, when he turned his head. Instantly I impersonated Lot’s wife. And then—Frankie, the mirage became firm turf of Paradise, fit for the cherub babies to tumble and

play on! I saw that someone was holding him! I found out afterwards that it was one of the Bhagabund people. If I were the Viceroy, I would remit all that village's dues and duties to the end of time. They are quite the best people you have in the district.'

She had brushed down hat and skirt; corrected her straying hair, and pushed it firmly under the reinstated hat; adjusted the chin-strap; decided it was too tight; loosened it; tightened it back again; found a score of fiddling little pleasant things to do about her person, even to the extent of dusting her boots with a wisp of dry grass.

Then she gave herself up to the luxury of unhurried approach.

### XLI

ROBIN WAS UNPERPLEXED BY HER VISION. 'THAT WAS all right,' he said. 'I know the old boy left a portrait. It's faded out, or filthed out, of recognition long ago, of course. But our local artists, since the populace agreed to pay divine honours to the irascible deceased, have stereotyped its salient features and improved on them. I've seen pictures—ghastly daubs, all rouge and hair, but recognisable; oh, yes, recognisable right enough for a deity who had many other noble qualities, but was certainly not bigotedly teetotal, and with equal certainty was British. You'll see them in the bazaar, on state occasions when the pious Hindu fetches out *all his gods*.'

There was nervous relief in her laughter. 'So one of the best yarns of our time ends in comedy!' she said. 'And I can't read a paper to the Psychical Research Society.'

'H-m. You could read an exceedingly valuable paper to other authorities, if you knew all there is to know about Klemmon Saheb's shrine.'

'I'm afraid I don't follow you.'

'It's just this. I understand perfectly well what was the face you saw. But there are other things I don't understand—and should like to understand. Who hangs a portrait in the boughs of a tree, carefully selecting an open spot that'll show it off to advantage, and at the same time draping its edges with leaves? And why is there an ascetic there, who objects to a memsaheb coming up? No one ever objected before.'

'But he's the chap who keeps the lamp burning, Robin.'

'Is he? The Bhagabund people have kept it burning a good century and more, without outside assistance. They know they'll have bad luck if it goes out. Promise me two things, Hilda.'

'I may.'

'You will. Don't tell anyone of your experience, except Vincent and Mayhew. They'll both have the sense to keep it to themselves.'

'Thank you for the implication.'

'Well, promise. *Swear*, as the ghost in *Hamlet* says.'

'I swear.'

'And promise me you won't go near the place again.'

She demurred. But he said: 'You know in your heart of hearts that you don't want to go.'

She demurred still more strongly. 'You don't seem to think much of my pluck, Robin.'

'Unfortunately, I think only too well of it. All right. At any rate, promise me that you won't go until I tell you I have been.'

She promised. Then added: 'Do you think I can have been right in thinking the leopard had been newly killed?'

'Yes.'

'But where?'

'In your stables.'

'What?'

'Didn't Vincent shoot a revolver off?'

'Yes. But—'

'Has anyone seen our leopard since? No. Well, *you* have. At any rate, his skin.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean, Vincent hit him more badly than he thought, and he either crept off and died a few miles away, or else was so weakened that someone finished him off with a stick, it may be days later.'

'Would any one *dare*?'

'Oh, yes. One of those Bhagabund fellows would. They're not afraid of a wounded leopard. I don't

mean they'd walk right up to him, and ask for a mauling. They probably put an arrow into him first, or several arrows. Then one would polish him off with a *lathi*.'

After a pause, she said, 'I wonder what Monsoon Cloud thinks of me.'

'He probably has the highest respect. And thinks no end of himself, into the bargain. He believes he's now a witch's hack, and takes his mistress on her rounds to her ministers of mischief. In this country, you know, leopards are witches' familiars.'

'It seems bad luck, that he should see both the first and the last of our leopard.'

'And poor Rustum saw what you might call the middle of him. You've offended the jungle demons somehow, Hilda. They've made a dead set at your dependents. Lucky you haven't a dog ! It would have gone.'

Vincent next day brought back from Calcutta the news that the long-deferred had happened. He had been transferred, and was at last leaving Vishnugram, for Salpiguri. Hilda's promise not to revisit Klemmon Saheb's grave was not to be tested.

## XLII

IN JANUARY DOUGLAS RETURNED FROM FURLOUGH, AND to Alden immediately the activities of even the Presi-

dent of the Independant Students' Asocciation became merely an object of detached and philosophical interest.

'I feel,' he observed to Mayhew, 'as if the prayer of the American missionary down at Kodaikanal, when I was decoyed there for a spiritual convention, in my green youth, had been answered. "Hasten the time, we beseech Thee, when the Prince of Evil will be driven back to those chains and darkness from which"—he thundered—"he ought NEVER TO HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO EMERGE." A whole pack of depressing blighters who have been vexing my days and nights have gone back to an obscurity that is way down below any horizon of intelligent, or even semi-intelligent, notice that I possess. This is peace, Mayhew; and it comes to the righteous, *if they only wait*. Mark my words! for there is truth in their every syllable.'

'There's no sign of peace coming to me,' Mayhew lamented. 'I haven't an understudy—'

'An over-study,' Alden corrected him. 'Douglas is my chief. Long may he remain so! I dread the time when I must take over for good. I have long ago done what Cromwell declined to do—I have flung away ambition. Mayhew, I charge thee, when they are writing my biography and snooping round to all the favoured few who actually knew me in the flesh, do thou put away envy, malice, and all small-minded

jealousy, and bear faithful witness, that this man, Robert Alden, was entirely without the frailty of ambition. I now, being still resident with thee in the earth-days, lay this solemn obligation upon thee.'

'An over-study,' said the patient Mayhew, 'to take on when I'm tired, and leave me to loaf and jeer.'

### *XLIII*

BEING A GOOD MAN AND TRUE, DOUGLAS REJOICED TO be back. He had found England disappointing. The statement merits elaboration.

The first thing that every returned missionary does, on arrival at the Home Base, is to have a row with his Board. This is but the bursting of a dam long harassed by the swollen and swelling waters, and should not be taken seriously. Once it is over, the stream sinks to a placid and useful level, and can be harnessed. The missionary can be sent on deputation, stirring up zeal in the stay-at-homes. Douglas's furlough had opened true to usual form, with explosion, reconciliation, and a programme of work. But the last was a grief to him, owing to the small-minded behaviour of the very first church he visited. The reader will have often admired the splendid Victorian-Gothic church that fronts directly towards the sea at Southend. It was here that Douglas began his labours. It was Whit-Sunday. The weather was per-

fect; nevertheless, the edifice (as the reporters of religious meetings put it) was crowded. Douglas rode a motor-cycle; it came to him, during the opening hymn, that he had forgotten to shut the engine off. He was a thrifty soul, and this troubled him. Since he found that it prevented him from giving up his whole mind to leading the congregation's worship, he suggested a few moments of silent prayer, particularly for our great Eastern Dependency, then passing through a time of such anxiety. When every eye was closed, he tiptoed down from the pulpit, through a vestry, and outside. Yes, the engine was still busy. Force of habit proved too much; the humming rapt his mind away, and he got on, and automatically went home. It was twenty minutes before a select search-party, after drawing the vestry and all adjacent coverts blank, reluctantly came to the conclusion that the reverend gentleman had finished with them for the day. My reader, being a broad-minded person who realises how misunderstandings arise and how swiftly the well-balanced dismiss them, will hardly credit the fuss that was made of this incident. Its fame hung about Douglas like a cloud, vexing everyone but himself—to do him justice, he put it away with the little concern that it deserved. His Board found it hard to obtain deputation work for him at all; and he complained to Alden of the growing coldness of the people at home.

'There was one place,' he told him, 'a beastly place called something ending in—up—'

'Hiccup,' suggested Alden.

'Bacup. That was it. Where I saw a fellow all through the service hanging about in front of the door leading from the church to the vestry. I couldn't understand why he kept on sitting there, apart from the rest of the people, when there were only about fifty present altogether. And then, at dinner afterwards, I was his guest, and a kid blurted out, "Daddy said he was going to watch out that you didn't play any more tricks and slip off after asking them to pray." I was annoyed, I can tell you. I went off in high dungeon afterwards.'

'Most unreasonable of them,' Alden agreed. 'After all, no one likes the thought of having left a motor-bike running for an hour or more.'

'Besides, anyone might be tempted to go off with it.'

'Of course they might. The whole incident illustrates a favourite theory of mine—that even the best of us make mistakes. Douglas, I'm glad to have you back. You are part of my notion of Vishnugram.'

To his wife he remarked, 'They were darned lucky that Douglas didn't conduct a peripatetic service, strolling in and out to return at ten-minute intervals with a remark that he had forgotten. I shall never forget that Christmas service he conducted in 1921, when he walked out half-way through the second

lesson, to swipe a boy that he saw torturing a dog. We heard the kid yell (with good cause, for Douglas has a palm like a square yard of elephant hide, and he does not bear the sword in vain); we heard Douglas's silken tones rising like a bombardment. And then Douglas was back, and was calmly observing, "But the greatest of these is charity".

## XLIV

TO JOHN HE HAD WRITTEN:

'Now that Douglas is back, I have only one job to get over, apart from the usual ever-abiding chores. When that is done, I fold my desireless hands and sprawl beside the Sea of Existence. I shall not even fling pebbles into its waves.

KNOW: I shall not set the job down in writing. I shall do it—I was ever a doer—and thou shalt hear, O Jackadab mine, in due season.

Then, in the felicitous words of Brother Nilkamal, "I wish to be free and easy in my little roving world in manners watched stealthily living by the whole world." Rejoice therefor.

I take my swan in hand, and add my cygneture—

ROBIN BESTFELLOW.'

Release, however, did not come readily. The job needed thought. After Hilda's experience, it was not

simple to pay Klemmon Saheb's shrine the unobtrusive visit that Robin planned. The shrine's guardian might be fanatic only, a hedge-priest who had adopted this unorthodox deity. But he was likely to be a tool, even if a madman. He now had patrons who would be keeping him there to scare off the English lady, should she return. They would certainly be watching for any other of her race. And Robin, despite his accepted foible of wandering widely and without reason, would arouse the most suspicion of all.

He might warn Mayhew. And Mayhew might send—probably would send—a posse of police. These would find nothing. Alden could *see* their elaborately tactful and casual approach, watched by scores of hidden eyes. Also, he was perverse enough to dislike the notion of passing on to Authority any information he had come by, unless it were information of intended crime. All he knew in this instance was that an enthusiast had taken possession of the grave of an Englishman who had been dead for over a century. He must go himself.

It seemed best to make a hurried and obviously incidental visit in good daylight. He would pick the shrine up as part of a circuit, and not make it a definite objective. To this end, he took a long cast, which fetched him up on the hilly shoulder behind the banyan. This entailed close on eighteen miles,

much of it a climb; not for the first time, he was glad of his reputation for eccentricity, possibly even for mild lunacy. He dropped down on the grove without having seen or, so far as he knew, been seen by, a single soul. He had not realised what a shelter the grove was, it was so long since he had visited it. In its shadow he strode forward boldly and openly, until he was brought up sharp by the sight of a hearth cut in the ground. The place's human tenant was in residence, and could not be far away. The hearth was full of glowing ashes.

Klemmon Saheb's house, hidden in a crooked elbow of the grove, was surprisingly small to have been built in the spacious days of John Company. There was a double explanation of this. The ground left by the banyan which occupied the plateau was trivial, and the cost of hauling materials to this height (even if you were an explosively-tempered colonel and living in Bengal a century ago) very great. The relics of a garden straggled round even yet, though time had run so long a course here. The brook, joined by a second, smaller stream, was deflected into irrigation channels that still carried water.

Alden thrust his machine into a thicket, so deeply that it was out of sight; buried his face in a quisqualis clump; went up the steps, and into the house.

He was noting in the main rooms signs of present use, when he happened to look to the farther window.

He saw a man go past. He stepped up to the window quickly, and from its edge took a careful observation. It was Dinabandhu Tarkachuramani, and he was carrying a revolver. Another man, whom he recognised immediately must be the 'exhalation', came round the corner furthest from his own entrance, obviously to act as guide. He met Dinabandhu, and was talking to him eagerly, and gesticulating.

Alden could not doubt that he had been discovered. He knew he had been senseless to come unarmed; even so, he had done it of choice, holding that he had no right to be prepared to take life. He had only one possible refuge. In his earth-days Klemmon Saheb had built a fire-place, large enough to burn even the banyan's generous gifts of dead boughs. Alden glanced up it, saw an out-jutting brick, thanked God Who had given him arms of notorious length, and swung himself up. There he was poised precariously, each foot on a roughness that might crumble and betray him.

The two men entered.

'Did you see him?' Dinabandhu asked.

Alden could hear every word clearly.

'Yes. He entered by that door. He was tall, and his arms were swinging.'

(The shrine's keeper, Alden noted, was not a principal in any villainy that was forward. He talked the crippled patois of the half-Sonthal hamlets, made

every *s* into *h*. It must have been a private and genuine enthusiasm that had brought him here.)

Seeing that the room was empty, they went out. Alden seized the respite to plant himself in a niche slightly more comfortable. He was far from happy among those bricks, many of which time had half detached; and he had seen a snake's tail withdrawn into a hole below him. The chimney had been recently used, and the air was by no means free from dust. The danger of betrayal by sneezing occurred to him; instantly the wish to sneeze became a torment. The search-party returned, obviously puzzled; Dinabandhu was questioning the hedge-priest, who held to his story.

'Yes, yes. I know he has been. Have we not found his cycle?' (A pleasant item of news for Alden.) 'But has he not gone again?'

'It may be so.'

From now on, until dusk, one or other of the pair was in and out continually, while Alden kept his cramped position. After a time Dinabandhu settled down in the room, and amused himself in various ways. He seemed to have a taste for music of sorts; he set patriotic Bengali records on a gramophone, which Alden had not noticed in his all-too-brief survey, and played several times 'The Wearing of the Green'.

At last another man came in, who was obviously an equal, and not the 'exhalation.' The two sat and

smoked, with long silences. Conversation was in English.

'Ramnath, that fool Alden's been here!'

Alden marvelled that he had not brought down the whole inside of the chimney.

'What was he doing?'

'What do you suppose? Spying round. Damned if I know why Jayananda sent me that message when I meant to have had him shot last May. I don't share our far too pacific friend's opinion that Alden is harmless. He knows too much.'

'Why do you not shoot him!'

Even in his tension Alden noted the thick, juicy pronunciation of 'shoot'. He wondered who Ramnath was.

'I should have done, if I had found him. Why do you suppose I brought this revolver?'

'What do you know that Alden knows?'

'He knows who fired his hostel thatch. He knows that we call Jatin as Prometheus, for a fun,' said Dinabandhu, lapsing into bad idiom.

'How *could* he?'

'We *know* he does. I've never trusted that man. He pretends to be pro-Indian,' the speaker sneered, 'and to be a kind of genial madman, wandering where and when he chooses. But is he? I have known Englishmen who were fools. Plenty of them! But I have never known one who was merely eccentric, who wasn't a

danger. I believe that he knows our secrets by the galore.'

'We must shoot him.' This seemed a fixed idea of the newcomer's. 'What is he wanting here now?'

'That sister-in-law of his who's married to another of Jayananda's protégés came riding here the other day. It was a good notion to put that half-witted Bauri here. That's where one scores by being free from superstition! We wanted a fellow to live here, and to keep suspicious characters away. Now, your good Hindu would have seen no use for a mad Bauri. This chap scared her stiff, and her pony gave her a beautiful toss-up. So now her brother-in-law's investigating.'

There was a long silence. Then Dinabandhu chuckled. 'We couldn't scare Alden's cycle, unfortunately. But I've slashed the tyres to pieces.'

This, also, was pleasant news for Robin.

Presently Dinabandhu added, 'But I am not sure that I did not make a mistake. Alden obviously saw us coming, and went to his bike'—*bike* as two syllables, *by-ick*—'and when he found it ruined saw that his bally game was up, and cleared off.' He yawned audibly. '*Hai, hai, hai!* Ramnathji! What do you say to changing this Klemmon Saheb shrine into a Siva shrine? If I could, I'd root out every sign of the English having ever been in India, even to their graves.'

But his companion was frightened. 'Do not say such things! The ghost will be angry!'

'Who? Old Klemmon? Not he! He will be flattered, to be promoted into the ranks of the real *devatas*. To become the Great God himself! Besides, we can kill two birds with one stone. Big birds, too! This jolly old Anglo-Indian ghost and Siva. Aha, my friend!' he shouted. 'So even the holy man of the railway bungalow has some superstition left, and is not all sheer humbug! All right, all right! I will finish my blasphemies. Well? The Great God has been very good to his worshippers. He gave us—assisted by yourself—your very serviceable little abode. Why not in return make him a new shrine at this place? One good turn deserves another, you know. Upon my word, I rather like the idea of doing a god a service.'

Robin had placed the second man. It was the saint who had stolen the bungalow by the railway.

A piece of brick crumbled at Robin's foot, and fell rattling out into the middle of the room. His heart skipped, by his own careful computation, looking back afterwards, at least a dozen beats. Yet he lived.

'What's happened?' asked both the Indians simultaneously, in Bengali. Robin could hear that they had jumped up.

Dinabandhu was the first to recover, and with a

laugh rebuked himself for his nervousness. ‘That chimney is a nest of snakes,’ he observed. ‘You have to get used to this sort of thing. Bits of stuff are always tumbling down. They get very playful at night, which is why I no longer care to sleep in this room.’

‘It is bhery cold,’ said the holy man. ‘Let us light a fire.’

‘Not a bad idea! Damn it! there’s no wood. You fetch some,’ said Dinabandhu slyly, ‘while I look for matches.’

‘There is fire in my hookah.’

‘Ah, yes. I had forgotten. Then I will get some paper, while you go out for wood.’

‘You come and help me with the wood. It is too much to carry.’

Dinabandhu laughed again. ‘Afraid! A *Sannyasi*, and afraid of the banyan’s *thakur*! Or is it of Klemmon Saheb—the gentleman who so kindly lets us have this jolly little house free of rent?’

‘Do not make a jest of the Dead! He can hear thee, madman!’

‘Ah, he is a *pret*,<sup>1</sup> and not a *bhut*. He would not hang about here.’

‘He is no *pret*. He was buried without any rites. My grandfather has told me. There was no priest of his religion here.’

<sup>1</sup> One who has been ‘sent on’—by the correct funeral rites.

Having amused himself with the other's fears, Dinabandhu consented to accompany him. 'For I also should like a fire.'

Alden did not want a fire; so, with a celerity admirable in any man, but trebly so in a man well over forty, he slid down from his perch, wishing the while that he were Mowgli and knew the master-word that would assure the snakes that he did not mean to hurt them, and desired only that they should keep their heads in. It was dark; but he could see the revolver on a table. It seemed better in his hands than in Dinabandhu's, so he annexed it; and slipped away, using such cover as he could find, going straight at first, for he guessed that he would have a start.

He had crossed the stream, though the sands sucked him down and delayed him; had stumbled through the hillocks; and on the burning-ground beyond them had tripped over a skull that was far from clean. With disgust he wiped a softness from his hands. And he felt that he was being followed.

He fell back in shadow of a mango; and watched, pressed against its trunk. His eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, and he saw that a man was walking over the level that was his own nearest way home. He gave Dinabandhu credit for pluck! Not so much in risking Alden, though Alden had a revolver; after all, he was the pursuer, he probably had a revolver

also, and in that black region he could track the Englishman, himself unseen. But in risking the ghostly perils of this river-bank that was one vast burning-ground, a haunt of chuckling spectres and man-detesting demons. Through these dark hours, the Fugitives' Mound (which both had just crossed) was a confusion of goblin battle; its inhabitants lay leaguer by day, and at dusk moved to attack or fell away in flight. Dinabandhu had travelled far from his ancestral mind! Also, he must be very desperately anxious to find Alden.

So there was no way home by the riverside. Alden thanked his stars (which were not shining, but might be presumed to be friendly behind the impenetrable blanket of the night) that he knew all the jungle ways. He made a detour, as soon as Dinabandhu was safely past; once in the forest, he frankly ran, risking every peril of the wilderness. Like a man in a nightmare he ignored everything but his own way. He must strive to get to Vishnugram first.

What this experience took out of him he did not realise then. Nor did he realise next day. It came home to him later, when he learnt slowly and bitterly that it had left a strain that would not be restored in this life.

He had more sense than to go straight to his bungalow. It had too much cover surrounding it, and he knew that the blackness held a hunter. He

routed out Mayhew, even here risking a shot from the drowsy policeman on duty, by slipping through a gap in the cactus hedge.

He had made up his mind, without any difficulty, that the present affair was not political, but mainly and plainly murderous. At any rate, it was a concoction of men without any strong prejudices in the matter of preserving life.

'Where've you sprung from?' Mayhew asked. 'Your wife has been worried to death about you. Says you haven't been home since tiffin. And it's now close on eleven.'

This was an aspect of the business that had not had enough of his attention. 'I know,' he said remorsefully. 'Do you mind sending an orderly to my wife, just to say I'm back?'

The message was sent; and Alden told his story. 'My only personal interest in the matter is my belief that you're on the track of the fellows that chopped up my boy. Also—'

'Also what?'

'Oh, nothing. Except that, for the first time in my life, I am inclined to think that the chances of a bullet lodging in my brain are not really remote ones.'

'I agree with you. There will be people now who think you know more than is good for them.'

'I don't mind,' said Alden wistfully, 'apart from the fact that I want to see this present mess clear up

into something definite, one way or other. Give me another two years, Fate! It's all I ask. But I do want those badly.'

'If those chaps,' he added, 'weren't playing about with revolvers, I'd have left them to do what they like. It's your job, not mine, to circumvent them. And circumvention ends nothing. It merely diverts what's bound to go on and on and on. It was this Exhibit A that brought me here!'

And with all the convincing finality of Othere before King Alfred ('Behold this walrus tooth!'), he extended his open palm, with the revolver on it.

'I dare bet,' he remarked to Frances presently, when he had told her his experiences, 'that, like those chaps in the Bible, Mayhew and his gallant lads will toil all night and catch nothing. In which case—'

He whistled softly. 'You know, my dear, I wasn't very sensible to-day. Yet I do not see what else I could have done.'

'You could have told Mayhew the place was dangerous, and he could have sent his police to see.'

'And the quarry would have known who sent them! Hilda's brother-in-law!'

'Hilda's a silly girl to go prying into every old ruin, and riding all over the jungles alone.'

'I don't think so. I think she's a dear. It's an added privilege of being married to you, Frankie—as if any

were needed—to have such a girl as a sister. But they'd have known who tipped Mayhew off. Mayhew's fellows would have found nothing. The place is simply superb for any sort of conspiracy. No villager will voluntarily go near Klemmon Saheb's ghost. After all these years, they still call him the *rag-y saheb*, the angry saheb. What a monumental temper the man must have had! To be a legend, after well over a century has passed by! The one man who has to keep the lamp burning has gone, but unwillingly and only in full glare of noon. Those Bhagabund people must have rejoiced when they were told that a special holy man had come, who was going to take over full charge! And Hilda's built the legend up more fearsomely than ever!"

"How, Robin?"

"I forgot to tell you. I only heard yesterday, though. That fellow who caught her horse is probably wondering how he ever had the spunk, and lies awake at nights shivering and expecting the ghost to get after him for his cheek in daring to interfere with the discipline of his i-shkole. They've got a lovely yarn going the rounds, of how Hamar's memsaheb tried to ride her pony over the grave, and the ghost rose out of it, and when he saw who it was would have carried her off to his own desolate regions. How's that for an up-to-date version of the Persephone saga? Never tell me that it isn't true

that they have but the one set of folk-yarns all over the earth! And she beat him off—plucky girl, Hilda! and drove right at him, and the pony rebelled and threw her because the ghost breathed out fire, and she ran in sheer fright down the terraces. And then Hamar Saheb immediately got a transfer, after being in the station for years, because the ghost was prowling round his compound.'

'It seems a compliment to Hilda! An unusual one! But how uncomfortable!'

'Isn't it? Norse or Icelandic, rather than Indian. But who would blame the Dead? There are no such golden girls as Hilda walking or riding the meadows of asphodel. I think her guess was right. Klemmon Saheb had seen only adventureesses in his own day; and he wanted to pin this undreamt-of lady to the spot, by halting her horse with terror. I don't want the Dead, after drawing blank what used to be the Hamar compound, to come on here and haunt *me*. It's saying a lot; but I've got a girl who's more to me than Hilda is.'

'Not only saying a lot, Robin, but saying it rather late, after the rhapsody that went before!'

'I say it late to make it more effective.'

There seemed no adequate rejoinder to this. He was allowed to continue. 'She hasn't been my comrade through all sorts of things that even my Guardian Angel hardly knows.'

'Speaking of him, Robin, his job hasn't been exactly easy always, has it? Do you mind if I say that what I can't help worrying about is, what's likely to happen to you? Suppose Mr. Mayhew finds the place empty?'

He hesitated before saying, 'I've one hope. If Mayhew gets no one, I must make terms through Jayananda.'

'Can he do anything?'

'Yes. I think so. I'm sure he's not in any of the present political business, but for some reason I can't cotton on to—' He stopped, and considered. 'It may be just curiosity. Or unwillingness, after having been a movement's head, to drop out of all touch with it. Or it may be merely that everybody, no matter who he is, goes and yarns to him, for the good of his soul (and every one of these Indians, even the gentleman who was prowling for my life with a revolver, a few hours ago, gets soul-conscious from time to time). Anyway, he insists on knowing pretty well all that's going on. And now I'm like Dunsany's fellows who had stolen the Idol's jewel, and had the Idol, as well as his priests, on their track. I have Dinabandhu's revolver; or had, until I handed it over to Mayhew. I wish I still had it! And I know something; and *they* think I know more than I do, and am more interested than I am. I'll have to make the trip out to Jayananda.'

'Mr. Mayhew—'

'He'll never catch them. Besides, Dinabandhu was following me, and will know I went to Mayhew. From that ledge they can see anyone coming for miles. They must have seen Hilda before she crossed the brook. That leopard-man has nothing to do but to watch for folk. Hilda took them somewhat by surprise. But they were probably more or less expecting me. Mayhew would have a chance, coming in darkness, if it weren't that this night they'll be very wary and jumpy. I only hope he doesn't get anyone killed.'

It proved as Robin foretold. The police found the remains of a considerable fire still burning, and signs of a group having been festal over hookahs and food. But no person. They stayed till dawn, and did a thorough search of the premises.

'I've got to keep what I found out under my hat,' Mayhew told Alden. 'All the same, I'm damned grateful to you. Yet I don't know why I should be. If there's one chap in Bengal whose life isn't worth a great deal, it's myself. But the same fellows who'll be out gunning for me won't mind bagging you as well, as an extra.'

#### *XLV*

'SADHUJI,' SAID ALDEN, THREE DAYS LATER, 'I WANT you to be the go-between, and to negotiate a treaty

of peace for me. Tell your friend Dinabandhu that he's got to cut out assassination, and to drop, once for all, his familiarity with bomb and pistol; and, if he'll do that, and you'll give me your word that he's done it, I'll file him out of my memory, and he need never give a thought to me or to what I may be doing.'

The Sadhu said nothing.

'Vairagi, you haven't heard what I said?' Alden repeated his ultimatum.

'Yes. I heard the first time.'

'You didn't answer.'

'I was thinking. Dinabandhu has been here already, with a demand that I transmit his terms to you. Tell Alden, he said, that he's got to realise that India doesn't belong to him, and that he's got to drop prowling about the country and pushing his nose into other people's business—'

'I should hold my nose before I pushed it into Dinabandhu's business,' said Alden with some indignation. 'On my soul! the man has a cheek!'

'Do you want to hear the rest of his message?'

'Of course. Sorry, Sadhuji!'

'If he does all this, tell Alden that he shall be permitted to take passage home to England next year, instead of leaving his bones in Vishnugram.'

'Please thank the kind gentleman for nothing! Why, I may be going home this autumn!' Though Alden had no intention of doing this.

'Dinabandhu thinks not. He thinks there'll be enough trouble to keep you over for a few months extra. And then—every Englishman is leaving India for good.'

'It's a sanguine programme. Has Dinabandhu eaten on the insane root? I respected his brains better.'

'You haven't had my note?'

'What note?'

'I sent you a message, "Leave the Dead alone." I knew you would guess its meaning.'

'Naturally. You meant that Klemmon Saheb's shrine was unhealthy for any living saheb. But I've found that out for myself. Anyway, your message hasn't reached me. And in what form will my message reach Dinabandhu?'

'In no form that you would accept. I censor the messages I get to pass on, especially when they are messages between a murderous fanatic and a would-be suicide.'

'You are a bit hard on us both, aren't you?'

'Not on either of you. Have you any idea how many revolvers there are in Bengal?'

'Thousands, I know. Anyone in Calcutta who wants one can get it—if he has the cash. So you won't tell me what you have told Dinabandhu?'

'I have told him that his conviction that you are a meddling spy is false, and that you know nothing except the little that his own folly showed you last week.'

'Did he believe you?'

'Officially and outwardly, yes. Actually, no. You see, Alden, you do travel about a great deal, and very unexpectedly, don't you?'

'Oh, yes. Not what you would call *travel*. But yes, I do, as it were, *percolate* through a wide tract of country between year's end and year's end. But I do it strictly for pleasure. Listen, Sadhuji. If I hadn't spent in the jungles every spare minute I have had, during these twenty years past, I should have gone out of my mind.'

'I put that to Dinabandhu. He's unconvinced. He doesn't get any particular good from the jungles himself.'

'He must remain unconvinced, then. Sadhuji, Alden went on hesitatingly, 'I owed it to my wife and child to make this gesture to ward off any trouble that's coming to me. Well, I've done it. They know my terms. They know I'm a straight man, and that I have neither right nor wish to be in the political side of the business. I can do no more. And I don't care about trying to do any more. The matter's out of my hands. Tell me, Vairagi,' he went on. 'Why have *you* still these subterranean connections with all this mundane bother? It is all of infinitely less than infinitely little importance, as it looks against Eternity?'

The Vairagi was silent.

'I don't understand it,' said Alden. 'It puzzles Findlay, too.'

'Do you understand your own case?' asked the Sadhu.

'No. But then, it doesn't bother me, as yours bothers me. I know I'm not a saint. I know I shall never be even a decently religious man. I am simply—Abu ben Adhem, if you like. I honestly do love my fellow man, and I care less than nothing as to what his race or even his creed is, though of course I *wish*,' said Alden wistfully, 'that he could see what I have seen. I used to try to cut out everything but God. But I know now that I am merely a man who has found his roots and home in this India he came—God forgive him! No!' he said defiantly. 'It was God Who sent him—to save. I say *roots*, Vairagi. But you know yourself that no man has fewer roots than I have. I shall all be blown away at death, I am such a wandering breeze by nature and habit. What does it matter what I am? Why should I waste a minute of these swiftly passing earth-days in digging into my own personality or bothering about it? I am not even sure that I have any personality. If I haven't, all the better. Aren't these days'—his voice grew husky with shame and emotion, so that the Sadhu could only just catch his words—'just my chance of getting rid of myself, this damnable fool that I am, who has done so little of all that he set out to do when he came young to this

country, and becoming something different? I'm just a reckless man who has found his safety—the only safety he cares about, which isn't physical safety, Sadhuji—'

'I know that,' said his friend.

'In *being* reckless, in looking for nothing but honesty and truth. You think I'm talking rot, Vairagi?'

The Sadhu was touched by the wistful humility in his face. 'No,' he said. 'We all know that you are as genuinely *nishkam*<sup>1</sup> as any Englishman so active could be.'

'I care about my fellows. And that's the only thing, after twenty years of missionary work, that entitles me to call myself God's servant. He'll find no other sign of His on me. But because of this He's bound to acknowledge me, and to use me, whatever happens, and on whatever plane of existence I find myself after this life has gone. There's no merit in loving men and women. It's the only way of happiness, and I found it. Or, rather, it found me.'

'You and I, Alden,' said the Sadhu, 'are only onlookers now. And both have been doers. If we'd met in the old Partition days, we should have annoyed each other more than any other Englishman and Indian could have done. Yet we should have become friends, and we should have each changed the other's thought. The time for that clashing has

<sup>1</sup> Without desires.

gone. We are both watchers in an India which has no use for us.'

'I know,' said Alden despondently. 'But I'm going to stay on, because *I* have a use for India. I've adopted it; and I simply refuse to be looked on as a foreigner in the business. I want to see it through.'

'Shall I tell you,' said his friend, 'what turned me into the nuisance that your countrymen still remember me as being, in the old Partition days and after?'

'But of course! Vairagi, all these years you've owed me as frank a soul-uncovering as I have many a time given you.'

'It was one incident, most of all. It made me wish to die, with sense of weakness, and rage. That's the way with us. It is usually one thing we see or hear. And then you say we are childish and illogical, that we ought to take a long view, and so on! That's all very well. The Roman patrician could take a long view; the Jewish patriot couldn't—he flared up in rebellion, and some general with artistic, philosophic soul crucified him in batches, and dismissed it as a ridding the world of fussy insects. Your Arthur Balfour can take a long view. Your working-class leader can't.'

Alden nodded. 'I know, I know. I understand, Vairagi. I have seen it for years.'

'I had just resigned from the Service. And I was drifting about—drifting not merely physically, but spiritually. And just then came Curzon's Delhi

Durbar. I had friends who could help me, and I could get in on the whole *tamasha*, just as well as if I were still serving the Raj. No, better; for I wasn't tied to my job. So I went up and saw. And I was not the only Indian who saw a great deal that was in no official programme.'

'What did you see?'

Jayananda hesitated, seeking for words. 'There was,' he said at last, 'a kind of intangible and immaterial mockery running under the show—'

Alden nodded appreciatively. Thus encouraged, his friend continued, speaking slowly and picking his language.

'As a skeleton runs under the body which we dress up and powder and fondle. It was humiliating in all its splendour and glory—for it was an alien pageant, for which India was paying. On the outskirts were our multitudes of spindle-shanked and eye-sunken folk. And on the surface, though they thought that all we saw was their power and dignity, was a great tossed-up foam of anger and meanness. Your Viceroy, as he went by a gathering of your ladies and gentlemen, was put to shame—put to shame by his own flesh and blood, who demanded such a standard of abject loyalty from *us!* And a few of us, who became the eyes and voice by which all India saw and heard, saw and heard them. And all India knew why the shame had been put upon him. It was because—'

In a blaze of anger Alden filled up the sentence. 'Because he had had the pluck to smash those Lancer fellows who had flogged a native groom to death.'

'But that wasn't all. Up by the throne you had a set of your ladies, all excited—'

'I know. All fussing about precedence, and who was who, and who was likely to be who afterwards, Sir John This and Lady This (whereas someone else would feel awfully sick if she remained merely Mrs. That)! It was a grand show! A golden carpet spread for them to display their dresses and the greatness of Britannia who rules the plains of India! And they were in at front seats, when in England they would have been nobodies.'

'There came up an Indian Prince. I prefer not to tell you who he was. After all these years, it hurts too much. The name would mean nothing to an Englishman—no, Alden, that isn't fair. I know, it *would* mean something to you. But you can guess how deep the stab of humiliation went, when it has made me, even now, unable to help for one second having it up against you that you belong to the race I once hated. But this man's name has only to be uttered, to be a star in the long story that we remember, with passionate pride and shame that we were what we were and are now what we are. He looked like a figure from the Council of the Gods—the old Vedic gods, I mean; not the squat, huckstering devils that we

have taken to ourselves in these later days. That of itself your ladies should have respected. But they did not *see* it! All they saw was one of these ridiculous natives, who had flounced himself up with folds of scarlet and orange silk, and was wearing an absurd-looking curved sword of enormous length. Not at all like the pomp they understood, and could see the glory of! Their own Lord Kitchener, who had just ridden by, with nodding plumes and ribbons and all the paraphernalia that *your* particular civilisation has sanctioned and idealised! It was only conquered India that was coming up to do obeisance to *their* Viceroy—India that had been at pains to dress itself up in its best and most honourable. And they broke into more than tittering—it was open guffaws! The Prince made his obeisance to the Representative of your King-Emperor. But I got the glimpse of his face as he turned it for a moment on those—people. All other passions but contempt and hatred had faded out from it. It looked like this stony Indian earth, at the time when the sunlight has faded out from it, and left nothing but bleakness and grey austerity.'

It was Alden's turn to know what humiliation was. 'Do you know what Findlay says about you, Vairagi? You make a fellow feel that it is he who is sitting naked—and not you, the Sannyasi. You need not tell me what happened in your soul. While you have been telling me what you saw, I have been there with you.'

He rose, feeling that he must get with himself, and must have the relief of acting, and not thinking in inaction, as now. ‘Is there in the whole world a controversy as dishonest as this Indian one, Vairagi? If Indians were to say that things had happened which they could never forgive, I should agree with them. If they were to say the long humiliation of that wretched half-century and more before we began to mend were a gulf that must remain eternal, I should understand. In fact, if I were an Indian, I should see no reason for wishing to remain in the Empire except the sordid one of sheer practical advantage. But they don’t put the controversy there.’

‘It *is* there,’ said Jayananda. ‘That is exactly where it is.’

‘But they never *put* it there. Dinabandhu never puts it there. They talk about exploitation, about hordes of officials, about our debauching and drugging India against her will, about the heaviest taxation in the world—when they must know, unless they are as half-witted as they seem to be dishonest and disreputable, that India is mainly a vast picturesque desert, and that her revenues are too trivial to be worth pillage.’

‘Nevertheless, there has been pillage.’

‘Oh, I know. I know. Don’t I know the *real* Indian case, the one that is never put? I wonder if anyone will ever bother to calculate how much of the prosperity of our good old South of England has its roots,

if you only go back a century or so, in some Ganges mud. We owe you chaps a settlement, if only to make up for the past. But the whole thing is the damnedest dishonesty the world has ever seen—the Indian screaming about the injustice of our growing tea and jute, where nothing grew before, and the British diehard puffing about our great gifts to the country. But what is all this, as the Bible would say, betwixt thee and me? Next year, Vairagi, when you have your great Nationalist Government operating—What portfolio,' he asked, swinging off suddenly, 'will Gandhiji hold? They'll have to invent some new secretaryship—of prohibition or non-violence or something equally abstract. Oh, I know I'm talking nonsense, and what seems like bitter nonsense! I know that he's an infinitely more turbulent Moses whom the Lord will remove as soon as he's reached Pisgah. Let our whole generation go, Vairagi!' he said passionately. 'You and I also, who belong to the conflict that is finishing, that *must* finish! We have both been in the heart of this anger that has been growing through all these years. Make your peace with me, Alden the Englishman, as I make it with you! And let us go, and leave our peace with those who shall follow us!'

'I have long ago made my peace with you, Alden; and through you and Findlay with your people.'

## XLVI

JANUARY 26TH WAS APPOINTED BY THE NATIONAL Congress as Independence Day; and when the Vishnugram District Board met in early February, Alden (but not Findlay) attending, the agenda opened with a question arising out of its observance. National flags had been unfurled in the villages, and the cost of these flags and of refreshments for patriotic speakers had been sent in to the District Board. The District Magistrate had been referred to, and had refused to sanction these items as a charge upon public money. Kshirode Babu was severe on the Secretary, Babu Krishnadas Pal. 'Why did you not pay the bills when presented? For what reason did you refer to bureaucratic government?'

'No orders had been received regarding payment for national flags and refreshments for speakers,' shrilled the Secretary unhappily. He knew the quibbling inadequacy of his defence.

'Orders! What orders? Are we not now Government *de facto*, and it is National Congress that has issued instructions?'

'What orders except those of beloved Motherland?' asked the owl-faced lawyer unanswerably. 'Motherland is starving while we talk,' he added bitterly.

'Well, in that case,' said Alden, 'I can't see that it's any kindness to supply her with this particular kind

of windy ginger-pop that passes locally for "refreshments". Our boys always insist on having it at half-time,' he explained. 'Whereas English boys prefer to suck a piece of lemon. However, I daresay it's the right stuff for political speakers.'

His impious words were succeeded by a pained silence. To 'jolly the meeting up,' as he phrased it afterwards, he went on: 'Hang it all, what do the flags cost, anyway? It's a matter of a square of four-anna cloth, and five minutes' stitching by some woman. I'd be ashamed to expect Government to pay for my pleasures—especially my patriotic pleasures. Even the U.S.A. Congress, which hands out money for all kinds of things, doesn't subsidise the Glorious Fourth.'

'Motherland is poor,' the owl-faced one sternly reminded him.

'She is,' said Alden thoughtfully. Then he brightened up. 'But *you* aren't, Kamala Babu. I tell you what. I've enjoyed this meeting so far immensely, and just to show that I don't mind paying for my pleasures, I'll contribute five rupees towards the flags and ginger-pop for Motherland, if Kamala Babu will contribute ten.'

'I am bhery needy,' said Kamala Babu. 'Government is rich.'

Under Alden's earnest gaze, though he wriggled he sat resolute. 'Owing to inadequate monsoon,' he

urged, 'litigation has been insufficient. I have been fighting with tooth and nail to keep wolf from door. During last year I have earned miserable livelihood by sponging my father-in-law.'

The meeting was in too austere a mood to attend to Alden's jibing cheerfulness. It passed a resolution censuring the Secretary, and protesting against the action of the District Magistrate; and proceeded to consider arrangements for a Salt March. Alden, after pointing out that the salt they could obtain on any portion of bona-fide Bengal coast was almost mythical—an observation rightly dismissed as irrelevant while Motherland was starving—spent the rest of the meeting drawing faces on paper. He took particular pains over Owl-face; then his old problem recurred, and he found himself confused by an imperfect recollection of whether a wombat was in the habit of folding its paws over its stomach or not. He was fast sagging downward into a welter of utter irresponsibility. This India, which had seemed so grave and serious a job and had drawn him here in all the eager hopefulness of first manhood, was growing featureless and voiceless. What had been a landscape and a face was becoming shadow and a dream. For himself, as he said bitterly, he was ceasing to care an O.B.E. what happened. He wondered if there were many members of the United English Nation who felt as he did.

## XLVII

THE HAMARS MOTORED OVER FOR A FEW DAYS BEFORE Easter, and for the festival itself. It was indescribably jolly to have them back. Mayhew again had Skinner, who was a sort of relation of Mrs. Mayhew, staying with him. The weather was now hot, and the jungles were almost closed by discomfort. But a holiday was too good a thing to be wasted. And there is only one way of using a holiday in India that is not held to be wasting it. Therefore, when Hamar called on Mayhew, the latter suggested a shoot.

'My folk have brought me *khubber* of bear at Simulbund. And there's stacks of peafowl about.'

'It's the close season for peafowl,' Hamar, the legal-minded, objected.

'Shucks! Who told me of running down gazelles in fords? Didn't you once see half-a-dozen on the bonnet of one car?'

'That was Corps headquarters in Mcspot,' said Hamar indignantly. 'And it was a General's car. I wasn't in that butchery, I'm glad to say. You see, I wasn't on the Staff.'

Skinner contributed a witticism. 'We're all on the Staff out here.' He stuck his chest out grandly. 'Every saheb may reckon himself a Red Tab in this country.'

The Law and the Guardian of the Law looked at each other. Then the Guardian of the Law summed

up. ‘The little bit of shooting we shall do will make no difference. These game-laws are not for us. They are for fellows who run down from Calcutta for a week-end’s shooting; and for the natives, who don’t know when to stop, but just ring the jungles round, and kill every last thing they see.’

In Mayhew’s own mind arose the question of whom to invite. He would have omitted the missionaries, on the ground that there would not be game enough to go round to the guns. But Mrs. Hamar might resent their omission. He put the point abstractly and generally. How many guns ought they to have, now that game was so scarce?

‘Oh, there’ll be mobs of shootable things,’ said Hamar easily. ‘Bears by the galore, as the Bengalis say. Comes to that, I’d just as soon not bag a thing myself. I’m going for the picnic; and the more, the better.’

However, it turned out all right. The missionaries were unable to join either the Good Friday or the Easter Sunday shoot. They were otherwise employed, it seemed.

The shoot brought in a miscellaneous bag—twenty-seven peafowl (Alden had not realised there were so many in the whole district, it was so long since they had been seen), a dozen junglefowl, as many hares and partridges, a few quail, four wild duck, a wild cat, and a dozen or so unshootable things brought down for the sake of practice and classified compendiously

as 'Kuch nais'.<sup>1</sup> The shikar party's efforts would have been more adequately rewarded if the beaters had not held up operations halfway for a quarrel among themselves. But there is always something that goes wrong. This was the experience of even the late Mr. Edwin S. Montagu on that black Sunday of January, 1918 ('I think my net bag for the day was about ten partridges, five hares, two black buck, and four pigs. All would have been better if the elephants had kept in line. . . . The total bag was about fifty pigs, twelve black buck, a hundred hares'). But the day in the jungles was very enjoyable, though only moderately successful.

On the Monday night, at the Mayhews', there was a re-union of shooters and non-shooters. As on most such occasions (and under the circumstances naturally), the talk was of shikar. Skinner, as fairly new to India, was stranded on the dry beach of conversation, a compulsory listener. Hilda noted this, and the nervous flying up of hands to face; and she took pity on him.

'We're in for an evening of men's shop, Mr. Skinner. I know now that the poet was right when he made the Ancient Mariner hold up the wedding guest for a shikar story. It *would* be for that! How full of insight the great poets are!'

'And I expect the Mariner's real crime,' said her

<sup>1</sup> Nothings.

husband, ‘though Coleridge, not being a shooting man himself, somehow missed it, was that he bagged the bird out of season.’

‘And the Spirit,’ said Alden, continuing the tale of surmise, ‘obviously a kind of subaqueous game-warden, was rightly wrathy.’ He broke into extempore verse:

‘That Spirit grim at his wicked whim  
Was duly and truly cross;  
For out of season, without rhyme or reason,  
He had slain the Albatross’.

‘While the rest of you get on with your exploits,’ said Hilda, ‘Mr. Skinner shall talk to me. He is too new to India to have been caught up into the current depravity.’

But Skinner’s host, who had been interrupted midway through his favourite bear yarn, unkindly gave his guest away. ‘Tell Mrs. Hamar about the hyena your brother shot when he was out in India during the War.’

‘If you *dare*, Mr. Skinner’—she drew herself erect defensively, against this new threat—‘I shall tell the whole company about the *dirzi*<sup>1</sup> my sister employed in Paris during the Peace.’

‘Mix ’em up, mix ’em up,’ said Vincent tolerantly. ‘My wife tell about the *dirzi* that Mrs. Alden shot; and Skinner tell about the hyena his brother employed.’

<sup>1</sup> Tailor.

## XLVIII

THE NEXT DAY WAS THAT OF THE LEKTESWAR "MELA." This has gathered round a black meteorite, an Image of Siva, that fell miraculously—no one knows when, but the temple, according to the *Bengal Gazetteer*, is only sixteenth-century. The festival is at the start of the real hot weather, the season of Siva as Rudra, the Storm-God. Hilda motored out to Kanthala in the morning, and brought Findlay in. In the afternoon, she drove her husband and Mrs. Douglas and Frances out to the *mela*. Robin and John chose to walk.

Douglas stayed at home to investigate a nest of purple-banded hornets, a discovery of that morning. 'Doesn't Mr. Douglas ever go to the *mela*?' Hilda asked her brother-in-law.

'Once, and once only, he has attended it, way back in the Dark Ages. He was on his notorious white mare, a creature of immense antiquity called Belinda; and it proved a noteworthy occasion in the long series of Lekteswar *melas*. He was within half a mile, when he had to shout at a clumsy bullock-driver who got in his way. The shout was one of Douglas's best, and penetrated far and wide, causing immediate panic. Two schools of thought formed instantaneously. One held that he was the cholera goddess; the modernists, however, were sure that he

was the vaccination officer (there was a lot of small-pox about). Either fear was adequate. In five minutes the *mela* was dissolved for that year, and a crowd afterwards estimated at twenty-five thousand was fleeing over the countryside.'

'Mr. Douglas seems to have a devastating effect on religious gatherings,' Hilda commented.

'Yes, he's a champion chapel-emptier. The Baptists may have his equal. But no other Church has.'

'What did he do when he saw the disturbance he had made?'

'Do? He did nothing. He didn't understand what had happened. He was too far off. He merely attended the *mela*, one of the only two who did, that year. He passed along the line of deserted booths, a majestic solitary, and saw how ordinary the wares were, how poor and ramshackle the booths. He's cut it ever since, and considers it an overrated show.'

'And is it?'

'I don't think so. But I see Douglas's point of view.'

'You said that two people attended the *mela* that year. Who was the other?'

'Well, as a matter of fact, I was along about half an hour after Douglas, and I stayed rather longer. It was a chance for a thorough investigation such as no saheb ever had before, or has had since. A lot of the things I found out I've kept under my own hat. I'd rather people didn't know that I know them. Now

I've roused your curiosity, Hilda. But you may as well set it to sleep at once, if not sooner. Helen of Troy herself wouldn't coax out of me things that I've kept quiet for close on twenty years.'

'I do not think it nice of you,' said Hilda, 'after I've been such a sister-in-law to you all these years, to suggest that you believe Helen of Troy would have been able to get more out of you than I could.'

'No,' he admitted. 'I was wrong there. I'd back you against her, in every way except one—that she had the luck to run across someone who told Homer about her. All the same, my lips are sealed until they have to open at the Judgment Day.'

'There's just one other thing.' Her brows puckered. 'Mr. Douglas, the stay-at-home, predicts trouble on the road.'

'He would do. It's one of those easy feats of prophecy in which he excels.'

'Will it be bad enough to prevent our getting there?'

'No. Not if you give yourselves twice the time that you'd need if you were walking.'

'Thank you. That's what I wanted to know.'

'It's queer to think you've been here four years, and never seen our main local show.'

'I've had good reasons for being out of the station each time.'

'Yes. I remember now. Well, John and I'll keep a

look-out for you all. You may as well be prepared for trouble afterwards also. Nine times out of ten the *mela* finishes in a savage thunderstorm. That's why they celebrate Rudra, the Siva of Tempest, at it. The sluices of heaven will open, as they did at the Flood, and the people will scatter to bullock-carts and hovels. Take my advice. See the show. Then cut while the going's good.'

#### XLIX

HILDA FOUND IT AS ROBIN HAD PREDICTED—THE ROAD 'stiff with people', and progress 'at the rate of ten hoots and one yard to the minute'. She felt that other motives besides courtesy had moved her brother-in-law and John Findlay to refuse to crowd them by their presence in the car. But they got there at last, and were able to join an Indian countryside on holiday.

It was a joy in widest commonalty spread, a bliss democratic and shared by every man, woman and child, whatever their rank or age. The *mela* was packed and thronging, yet at rest, all interests of everyday set aside, as here each with perfect freedom found an expression. In one corner was a 'sharkass' (circus), with boards advertising that 'the world-reknowned Professor Mookerjee would show his great feets of strength'. There were booths selling simple and sickly sweetmeats or wooden dolls

coloured brilliant red and yellow and costing one pice each. There were the inevitable ascetics of many kinds. One sat on a mangy tiger-skin, at the entrance to the temple, a rosary of rudraksha berries round his throat. Just as John and Robin (who were in the thick of things, having arrived earlier) had made their way to them, a group of Vaishnavas began singing in chorus to their leader.

'What is he saying?' asked Hilda of John.

Findlay listened. 'Can't quite catch it. *Keno Hari Lanka pari*—' He looked at Alden questioningly.

'*Pare*, probably. Perhaps for *upare*. That means *above*. Or it may be the postposition *pare*, *after*.'

'Well, the gist of it is: Why did Hari—that's Vishnu, as Rama—go to Lanka—that's Ceylon, you know. It was to save Sita, of course, whom the demon Ravana had stolen from him. But this chap sings that he went there because the people were ignorant and sinful, and enslaved by the demon. Hari went to save them.'

'It's rather unusual'—Robin was again annotating his fellow-pundit—'to have Bengalis singing about Rama. In Bengal we are all Krishna-mad, we don't really take much stock of Rama. Tagore once remarked to me: "You know, my people don't take Rama quite seriously. We call a big fool *Bokarama*, the Rama of *bokas*. I always think that's a little less than respectful".'

Each country has its particular brand of simpleton, as autochthonous as any beast or bird of its woods, his quality eloquent of the soil and air that nurtured him. Bengal produces the *boka*, a peculiarly stolid kind of walking stupidity. Robin was famed for having coined the word *bokacity*.

The procession for which Lekteswar is known all over Northern India began. Carrying pots of fire on their heads, hundreds of childless women marched the circuit of the shrine, worshipping the god, that he might grant them sons. One after one they came, their eyes aglow with the same fervour that Findlay had seen in those of women bowing before the Buddha in Burma and of women rapt to ecstasy in churches in Europe. It was the one passion, seeking a way to the best it knew—the passion of a woman's selflessness and sacrifice, a fire that went out without smoke or cloud. At the end of their march, they entered the temple gates, and flung their blazing coals down in the sanctuary of the Great God. The flames flickered and swayed for their few minutes, and then the coals grew dark. Each woman's eyes were praying that her shame of sonlessness might be taken away, and her life made meaningful and fruitful; the whole procession was praying, and the watching crowd with it. It was not these ignorant women of the poorest and most backward district in Bengal who were praying. It was the procession of

womankind through the ages; and those flames fading out on the charcoal were their vanishing lives. Watching the tense, excited faces, John and Robin saw the look that was once on St. Theresa's and St. Joan's faces. It was little that was asked of the Divine, and they were willing to pay all they had for it—they asked only fulfilment through pain and drudgery, and for another life to be the crown and fulfilment of their own.

Findlay's mind passed into a trance. Outward circumstances fell away, and he saw that spreading plain by the river's brink as life itself, the world of men and women, the endless and uncounted pilgrimage. Thunder rumbled menacingly, inky clouds were rolling up; the shattering of their pleasure hung above this helpless crowd. His heart filled with an infinite pity; and in that moment he knew the mystic's experience of oneness with the pity and passion of God. He *loved* this crowd, as he had loved his wife and child; all were children of the one Love, the ineffable pity that was going to Lanka—no, Lanka was forgotten, as his mind filled with things so poignantly felt that he could give them no names. In that moment, Findlay felt that his heart would break with unbearable happiness, if in some way, in any way, it might be given him to die to bring some good to that multitude. His companions lost him. They had climbed a mound, to view the fair better,

when they saw him again, at the temple-gateway, talking eagerly and happily. A group of young men, aggressive Nationalists, were exploiting the *mela* and its excitement. They had insolently turned back Mayhew, despite his perfectly justified protest that the courtyard had been open to all ever since the *mela* began to be held. In Findlay's face there was that which made them give him a free way, when he presently chose to enter. It is certain that he never even saw them.

As Alden had foretold, the Great God closed his festival with tempest. Findlay did not return; and when the time came to go, Alden, who had pushed in past the young men, some of whom were his own students, or former students, could not find him in the courtyard. He had been there, he learnt; and he had been telling of the Love of God. But he had gone. All through that night, and through the next day, Robin was searching along the roads. Towards evening he caught a rumour, vague but enough to set his mind at rest as to its major fears, that John had been seen with a group of Vaishnavas who were going from place to place. He had not stayed with them, however, for they were tracked down, and said that he had left them after walking with them during one day. It was not until a week later that he arrived at Kanthala, worn with want of sleep and food, but with the ecstatic light in his eyes that told

of his peace. There was nothing to be done, nothing to be said. 'Why, I simply mixed with the people, and came along with them,' Findlay told Alden. 'That's all there was to it. You might have known that I should get here sooner or later. Where else should I go?'

## L

The spring had passed away under the shadow of a tenseness India had not known since the War. The succeeding weeks drew Alden into an increasing despondence. He might be what he had phrased himself, 'the loneliest man in India'; but no man was more sensitive to the currents of feeling in both his own and the Indian community. His own people had lost their way, and were groping. There come such times in the history of every people, but rarely so devastatingly and chillingly as to the British now. As for the Indians, it was not pleasant to feel everywhere, in his classes and in the faces lifted to his on the road, evasion, dislike, resentment, or often, venomous wrath and hatred. Men did not know what they dreaded. Menace hung over the land like a thundercloud.

'The discipline of this i-shkole,' he told his wife, 'gets worse and worse. *One* boy—need I say that I refer to my old school-chum Mahatma Gandhi?—is going from room to room telling the other boys to

make all the disorder they can, short of slaying the master. It's like the generous latitude given to the Devil against Job. Do all the beastly things you can, so long as you remain strictly non-violent. Give him boils, take his goods, all except his life—only against that stretch not out thine hand. And he can't be expelled, or even given sebhore corporal chastisement. For why? as the Hundredth Psalm pertinently asks. Marry, because he is a Mahatma, and a Saint. Also, strictly non-violent.'

He had a flitting interview with Hamar in Calcutta, midway through April. His brother-in-law was inclined to accept the official view, which was cheerful.

'Gandhi's movement has been a flop,' he said.

'I don't agree,' said Alden. 'He may not have any very obvious mob of followers, besides those massing round his immediate presence. But all India is watching, in a mood that I can only call dry tinder. A spark will set the whole flaring, as it has not flared for seventy years. And big business, especially on the Bombay side, is going to do its damnedest to see that Gandhi doesn't fail. Add the Parsi millionaires, as you will have to before another month has gone by; and you have given fanaticism and hatred such finances as they never dreamed of having. When greed and righteousness are knit together, we shall face an opposition such as no other power has ever

been up against. That's the result of our folk having brought in Imperial Preference in the Legislative Assembly last month.'

'All the same,' said Hamar, 'there's just one question I want to ask. Is Government never to be allowed to make a mistake? Has there ever been, anywhere, in any age, an opposition as unfair and unreasonable as we have now? They demand perfection—in everyone but themselves. Let there be one slip in tactics, and that's all the excuse they want to refuse to do anything but raise hell. Do they want a settlement?'

'No,' said Alden. 'They don't. They prefer to be patriots. If you're a statesman, everyone throws half-bricks at you. But no one throws them at patriots. A patriot doesn't make mistakes, you see.'

As Alden predicted, big business threw itself into the struggle. But he did not foresee that the women would be thrown in also. The day after Mr. Gandhi's arrest, Douglas and he noted a queer bunching of their students, as of bees in swarm. When they went across to begin the day's work, they found both College and hostels full of Hindu ladies. Such a sight India had never seen before. Here they stood, at every approach, scornfully offering their bangles to any student who showed that he wished to attend classes. This was the equivalent of the white feather that English girls had once taken upon themselves to

give to young men not in khaki. The West had invaded the East with a vengeance!

The National Congress flag was flying on every hostel, and from the College.

Douglas acted with the directness that Alden knew he would show. He invited a deputation to discuss things in his office. After some hesitation they came, the women showing no shyness or coy awareness of themselves, the students the more shamefaced of the two groups.

The wife of a Brahmin lawyer, a girl with eyes that could light defiance in any others that met them, spoke. Alden knew she had been educated at Calcutta University; he found himself wishing that he could teach his own students the simplicity and clearness of her English. She put forward an ultimatum. The College was to be closed for Mahatmaji's arrest; and it was to fly the Congress flag henceforward.

Douglas rejected both demands, with a gentleness and reasoning tone that surprised his colleague. He pointed out that they drew a Government grant, which was absolutely necessary to them. Would the Congress give an equivalent grant? They were neutral in politics. When an Indian Government functioned, they would ask it for a grant. Meantime —did Mrs. Banerjee think they would deserve her respect, or the respect of their students, if they acted

with such disloyalty as to draw a grant from an authority they were treating with contempt?

A student alleged that the National flag flew on all the hostels and the main building of the American College and School at Iswaranagar. The authorities there had told the students that they were right in supporting their National Movement.

Alden wondered how much of this was true, how much an exaggeration. But he burst in with the question: 'And how much work is done there?'

The students broke into amusement. 'Not a word! No work is done there.'

'There's precious little done here,' thought Alden to himself. But he kept this reflection silent. 'You know how we feel,' he said aloud. 'You have had Mr. Douglas working here for twenty-five years; I have been here twenty. You know that we hope to see the time when we shall be guests in your country, and not people whom you look on as intruders.'

He had touched their pride and their desire to be hospitable, two very deep emotions. He and Douglas *were* their guests, in reality; they had thrown away their best of manhood living with their sons and brothers and with the husbands of some of them. Many a queer, impulsive action or daring jest had been told in their homes. After all, the Indian problem would be easier of solution if it were exactly what the outside world chooses to think it—a relation

of brutal, overbearing alien with subjugated native. Unfortunately, it is also a tradition of close comradeship, in which the partners despite themselves have learnt something of each other's psychology, and have in thousands of cases found it impossible not to like each other. There was no fear or weakening in the Englishmen's faces. It was the habit of their blood to see a situation, crudely perhaps but unencrusted with passion, and they would die before they consented to take up a false position. But they had pointed out that they were guests. And it was true. Not half-a-dozen years before, Mrs. Banerjee's husband had been their student, and captain of the College Cricket Eleven. He had protested against his wife leading the wrecking party against the men who had taught him play as well as work; and had invoked against the action the name of *gurubhakti*—'reverence for teachers.'

'We have never flown a British flag,' said Douglas. 'It isn't the British custom, in any case, to fly flags. We think that love of country is too sacred to be always made a fuss of. I am sure that you yourselves will see that we cannot do what you ask. But there should always be courtesy between friends, so we ask you to take the flags down yourselves before to-morrow.'

The flags disappeared in the night. Next morning, Mrs. Banerjee, who seemed to have dismissed

purdah for ever, walked into Douglas's office, and asked him if he had taken the flags down.

'No,' he said. 'I do not know who took them down. I left that to you. I was sure you understood how we felt.'

### *LI*

AFTER MAY, ALDEN WAS ALONE, HIS WIFE AND CHILD having gone to Naini Tal. Presently he ran up himself, for a few days. But he refused to let any argument beguile him into staying.

'No. I *won't* get up a party to go on one of those Himalayan trips. I know those trips. They illustrate to perfection what is the only argument for a holiday—that you get so much discomfort that you are heartily glad to be back at your job.'

'A trip would do you so much good!' his wife urged.

'I don't *want* to be done good! I want to find some object on which to vent my spleen and blues. I want something to *hit*. Anyway'—weakening—'whom could I get to go with me?'

'There's Gavin Johnson, of the Scottish Mission. He's at a loose end.'

He received the suggestion as an outrage.

'Thanks! He can remain loose!'

'I've heard you say that he's a thoroughly good fellow.'

'Then you now hear me unsay it. Don't keep dragging up a chap's past against him, Frankie, especially when he has repented in sackcloth and ashes for it! I can't *stand* his large, loud, throaty, oafish, *ultra*-sincere laugh. Centuries of whisky and Calvinism must have gone into that laugh; and then the scoundrel dedicates it to the use of God and the Y.M.C.A.! Why, being a good fellow is in a way Johnson's profession. He puts too much *gusto* into life.'

'He's fairly fractious and unreasonable, isn't he, Hilda?'

'Yes. As a rule, he is. But in this case I agree with him.'

'But you've never met Mr. Johnson!'

'Mr. Johnson is a man whom it is not necessary to meet. You can take him on the evidence of your eyes. You forget that I had the misfortune to sit behind him at the concert last night. And'—said Hilda, rapidly developing her argument—'I don't like the way his hair—it *is* his hair, isn't it, and not some Scottish kind of wig imposed on malefactors?—tufts up in the cracks and interstices where his head joins up with the rest of him. In fact, he has the most *uneducated* neck and ears I ever saw. I would guillotine a neck like that. I would have all such offenders cut off.'

'Strange, whirling, wandering words!' said Frances.

'Strange? No. Just and natural. Whirling? Perhaps. But hardly wandering, Frankie! You must admit

that they are very much to the point. And—for once—though I don't like doing it—I support Robin.'

'Then,' Frances sighed, 'I suppose you'll go down to-morrow.'

'No,' said the inconsistent one, encouraged by having found an unexpected ally. 'I shall stay till the day after. The Pentecostal Brethren of Sanhualpa (Cal.) have convened a convention, as their circular neatly puts it.'

'You're surely not going to waste your time attending it!' said his scandalised wife.

'Yes. I am,' he said defiantly. 'I want to find out if I alone have gone out of my mind, or if others are mad with me. Besides'—he fell back on his favourite quotation—'I feel I want to see

"These blessed creatures and to hear the call  
They to each other make".'

'You'll find it strangely like the bleating of sheep on a hillside,' Hilda predicted.

'All the better. It will bring back my dear, native Cumberland. They've managed to rope in Baptists and Presbyterians, and Welsh Presbyterian Calvinistic Methodists, and a whole zoo of theological fauna. There is to be an address by the Reverend Zephaniah Zooks, who has been ten years in the country without learning enough vernacular to ask for a glass of water and who cycles about with Scripture texts attached

to his wheels as they revolve. I confess, the whole prospect interests and moves me.'

Yet the Convention itself merely brought out, as he owned afterwards, the worst that was in him. He came away from it in almost a passion. 'I ought to have known that even at my philosophic years those Pentecostal Brethren would annoy me. They still seriously hold that the crime of being non-Christian cannot be palliated by any attendant circumstances of ignorance or the misfortune of having been born out of America (I believe they have an advanced wing that reluctantly passes England as a possible, though highly undesirable, alternative). It entails an eternity of physical torment, which is hastening on for the whole world, and may be expected to begin within five years, at the most. And the fish-faced bigots had the cheek to take it for granted that every other child of man present was as wrapped and lapped in utter crassitude as themselves. I cleared up the misunderstanding, as regards myself; and then saw I had been an ass to think it worth while. For the rest of the séance I sat apart and loathed, a pariah, while that particular pet of the Y.M. folk, the Reverend Simeon Washington Das, proceeded to make an exhibition of himself in all his versatile poisonousness. To signify to the world that the Church was leading the way in genuine democracy, the Convention had elected this brainless little rat chairman. He owes everything to

Missions, and would be hard put to it outside Mission employment to earn five rupees a month. Yet he poured scorn and what he considered very smart sarcasm on missionaries, accused them of arrogating all power and emolument to themselves, and of making a mess of everything, and wound up by demanding that all finances be handed over to himself and to other uncharitable half-wits like him. I longed for the society of some of the decent heathen that I know, and my hands were simply itching to lay him across my knees and teach him some sense. Why,' he wailed, 'was I ever given these hands if I am never to be allowed to use them?'

'Frankie,' he concluded, 'it's the old heart-rending story. If you are going to be on the right side, you have got to be prepared to chum up with skunks. As I once remarked to Jayananda, it would be only too easy to be pro-Indian, if it didn't mean being pro a certain sort of Indian.'

'What did Jayananda say to that?'

'He said, "So you've run your shins up against that sharp fact, have you?"' And then he coolly added, "And in this controversy it would be only too easy to be pro-British, if it didn't mean being pro a certain sort of British." So that was that. Honours even, and all nice and friendly. Dear, I see now that I was wrong. In my heart of hearts, I knew that this Convention would wreck my peace and that duty called

back to Vishnugram. I yielded to the Tempter, and dallied here, when I should have gone at once. It was very wrong of me; and I have been punished.'

'You *ought* to listen to me more than you do, Rob. I'm sure you can't keep on at the pace you've kept all these years.'

Remorse stabbed him, as he looked keenly at the anxiety in her face. But a demon of restlessness was driving him.

'I'm all right,' he said gently. 'A man can do only what it is given him to do. "The way is the way, and there is an end." I have been set a course in this India, and I have to run it. I don't begin to understand it, and I don't in the least know how much longer it will last. But I'm happy only when I'm carrying on. And Naini Tal is no use to me.'

'Is it any use to me, Robin?'

'Yes. It keeps you well. And it keeps Betty well.'

'It's very dull, Robin.'

'Of course it's dull. The Lord meant that these hill stations should be dull. Aren't they for the use of officialdom? I'm no good to anyone these days,' he concluded savagely. 'Let me go where my madness doesn't matter.'

## LII

HE WENT. BUT IT WAS FATED THAT HE SHOULD RETURN.  
In late June, College re-opened; and he carried on

until the last day of August, when suddenly, while dictating a paraphrase—to such beggarly misrepresentations had education become reduced, after twenty years of heartbreak and hope-destroying effort—he reeled down, with *Samson Agonistes* gripped tight in a convulsed hand.

Douglas took him down to Calcutta, three days later. The medical verdict was that he was done with work for the present; he was ordered home as soon as he could face the voyage. He had strained every one of his superb powers, the heart most of all. He was not to return to India—but this part of the sentence was a dead letter, as all who knew him realised.

From Calcutta he went to the Hills. On the way up, his wife tried to point the lesson of what had happened, in a way that would go home. ‘Through not listening to anyone, you’ve given trouble to everyone. You’ve made Mr. Douglas come in to Calcutta; and he’s frightfully worried about you. “It’s just suicide, Mrs. Alden,” he said. “And I have to watch it slowly happening, with the best man any fellow ever had to work with.” You’ve fetched me all the way from Naini. You’ve inflicted minor but considerable inconveniences on Mr. Jacks and Hilda. You don’t know how glad we are that we are going to have you with us! But it’s little fun having you this way!’

*LIII*

HE PRESCRIBED A WEEK OF SOLITUDE FOR HIMSELF, and moved away from Naini, to a smaller lake set amid lonelier hills. Here he did nothing. He watched the changing mists, and the cedars' differing shapes between dawn and night. For the first time in many years, he rested, and was without a job on hand. And as he rested comfort reached him—illogically, as it always does. He saw the wood-fledged hills, not as idle—not as idle at all—but as guardians of the endless reservoirs of a people's life. Without them, this lake would shrink to a muddy pool, the rivers that carried strength and coolness through the hungering, thirsting plains would dry up, the canals would fail. He marvelled as he watched how *busy* the driving mists could be. It was no wonder that men had been awed as they looked on their varying forms, and—still more; for mere forms could not have fooled even the gazers of the primitive world—had watched the purposeful, steady way in which they were impelled across the face of the woods. How could men have imagined otherwise than that there were fingers at work there, a spirit directing and moulding? Had he been a poet, he would have found expression in some verse that spoke of the secret abiding-places of health and power and existence itself, the hidden and rarely-visited shrine of the

world's palladium. As it was, he merely looked and thought and rested, and felt even more of his desire to be individual and distinct shredding away. He was content to have lived, and have had work to do. It mattered nothing what happened hereafter to the particles that composed his body. As for the soul, he believed that it would live after the body, and if immortality came he would accept it as a gift, sure to be good since mortality had been good. But he would not repine if this life finished all.

When he returned to Frances and Hilda, he told them, 'I haven't had any great vision. I guess they come only to saints. And I'm no saint. But this break-down's been a good thing for me. I did not know Brother Ass had so much kick in him. He's fairly floored me. I've got to take him into consideration in future. When thou wast young thou girdedest thyself and wentest whither thou wouldest. But when thou shalt be old—'

'But no one could take you for old, Robin darling,' said Hilda.

'Until yesterday—no. I've learnt better now. Don't you know that I've been in India a century and a quarter? Any saheb who was here before the War', he said, relapsing into his old semi-serious nonsense, 'is a veteran. The youngsters who've recently come out call you "sir", and ask you respectfully if you didn't think at the time that the Duke of Welling-

ton was taking an unwarranted risk by his plan of campaign at Assaye. They want to know what it was like in the pre-Mutiny years. Frankie, my brain's been clearing. At first it was all a blur. Then it gathered itself into lines of poetry—all sorts of poetry. It's a silly mind—'

'It's a very dear mind,' said his wife—which was more than he deserved.

'No. It's a clumsy machine. It collects tags, as if it were a jackdaw stealing bits of coloured cloth. At one time, I could think of nothing but Coleridge's lines:

"There was a time when, though my path was rough,  
This joy within me dallied with distress,  
And all misfortunes were but as the stuff  
Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness."

That time, I knew, had gone from me for ever. But then I saw that things weren't as hopeless with me as they were with poor Coleridge, and that these thoughts were not for me. It's true that I've done nothing. But who does do anything? I've achieved nothing,' he said fiercely. 'I'm sure of nothing—nothing at all! But don't let anyone tell you I've given the fight over. I'm *not* out of it.'

'I should say not!' said Hilda. 'The most pugnacious man in India!'

'Then I worried about John. And I saw I was getting wretched once more, and I said to myself, "What! in ill thoughts again!" And I would repeat

it, and scold myself. "Robin Alden—*you!*—in ill thoughts again! And you're always in them, you miserable, unteachable fool!" And it came over me in a flash that John had won his battle, which is all any man or woman can do—just win his own individual battle for his own generation, against his own problems and his own trials. And I saw then that all my old dreams were wrong, that God was not going to let me see one of them fulfilled. One was of John and myself growing old together in a changing India, that was moving out of its memories and miseries.'

After a pause, he said, 'There came a hard thought for me, who have been his friend all these years. Just listen to me a bit longer, while I sort things out. I've been lower than anyone can guess. It's been a bad year for me; everything I've touched has gone to failure in my hands.'

'What has gone to failure?' asked Hilda.

'There's the College,' he began. 'Those students—'

'Damn the College! Damn the students!' she cried passionately. And, to his amazement, burst into tears. 'If anything could show up the folly—the—the criminal folly of the whole business out here, it is that men like you should be wasting your lives being harassed and lied about by those perfectly imbecile babies. You think it's been a strain only on you!' she sobbed. 'And that you haven't added to the strain on others, by having no sense about yourself!' Then she had

pulled herself together, and was trying to laugh. 'I'm so sorry, Robin. But the childishness of the thing overcame me, and made me behave like a child myself.'

'No,' he said, looking gravely at her. 'You're right. I have been about as blind as any man who thinks he has a job laid on him by the Almighty—or by his duty, if you like—can be. I honestly will be saner. And I know just how you feel. A man doesn't have the luck of you people; he can't break down and get relief, he either keeps on going or he goes smash altogether. But I know now what an unnatural atmosphere we've all been living in. Everyone in India, British and Indian, seems to have gone hysterical. I wonder that the rest of the world doesn't notice that the whole country is screaming and throwing itself about. And I put *my* jumpiness down to the mess I had made of my own job!'

'Robin, you shall tell these lies no longer. What mess? You've driven Frankie almost out of her mind with worry about you; and you've had her crying this ten minutes. Where have you failed? Look me in the face, if you can, and repeat what you have been saying, as I tell you two things. There isn't anyone, man, woman, or child, that can meet your eyes, even when you're worried, without feeling that there is a peace of God, even if it has lodged itself in the most restless man in India, probably in the whole world. And when an Englishman, and that man John Findlay,

has given you the last key of his heart, you—well, you have a right to take off your hat every time you think of yourself, Robin dear!'

She interrupted him, putting a hand across his lips. 'You've got to promise that we are not to hear another word about your alleged failure. We are not interested in your failure, or what you choose to consider your failure. I'm not even interested in your students, who spend their time sulking when not on strike. Frankie may be; but I deeply doubt it. Promise! *Swear!* as you once made me swear!'

When he had promised, he was allowed to continue. 'I haven't told you all the verse tags that ran through my mind. My brain was going round—and round—and round, in rhythm. That's the penalty of having taught Shakespeare all these years. You become a regular verse-addict; anything that rhymes or chimes or doesn't lurch straight in a flat-footed prosy fashion sticks. Add to that, that any man who has been in India ten years isn't altogether sane, in any case. Well, I had a couplet from a hymn walking through my mind, again and again:

"All men shall live in His marvellous light.  
Races long-severed His love shall unite."

And I thought, as I have often thought before, that there are certain things for which, if I were an Indian, I should never forgive the English. Yet they *have*

forgiven us, they don't bring these things up against us, what they do bring up is tosh and sheer cag that *can't* endure, once we settle down sanely to make the best of living in the world together. Heaps of them have a kindly, sometimes semi-amused perception of us, just as I have of them. They have a sneaking pride even in being in the Empire. And I saw that it didn't matter an O.B.E. how the Simon Report was taken, or even how the Round Table Conference pans out. If there's a check, it'll be a check only, and not a finish. Nothing on earth, nothing in the Three Worlds, not even the Devil or'—and Robin uncharitably named two prominent public men—'can prevent a peaceful settlement. I've already made my own separate peace. Now I'm going to sit back, as the Church Triumphant does on the lilded further bank of Death's River, and watch the rest of my host coming into line with my own wise decision.'

'Oh, yes, I've made a mess of this year,' he concluded. 'I never found out who cut up my boy. I never shall find out. I haven't been able to prevent my students from carrying heads that fumed and fussed as if they were full of bees. They haven't learnt a thing, any one of them. And I know less than ever why I do anything, or why I should come back after furlough. And if anyone alleges that I have wasted the best twenty years of my life, and have got into middle age with only a memory of futility, I haven't a word of reply.'

'Which truly makes it a unique occasion!' said Hilda. 'And I'm not sure that you haven't broken your promise.'

'Anyway—'

'I like Robin's *anyways*,' she said. 'They always show that, after the widest possible divagations through the meadows of flowery nonsense, he's going to come home to the tiny shack which has all along been the only thing he owned in the world of sense and reason.'

'Anyway,' he smiled, 'I don't care. I'm content to face the fact that I'm nobody, but nevertheless a nobody who finds it very pleasant to be spoiled by two charming women, both of whom are gracious enough to accept me as belonging to them.'

'And for that, sir,' said Hilda, 'I am going to be ungracious enough to give you your own quotation, which you threw at that poor chap you found talking to Jayananda:

"Thou thoughtest on thy prowess and thy sin."

Stop doing it, Robin Goodfellow. For it's very hard on us.'

#### LIV

ON THE 14TH OF SEPTEMBER, THEY HAD A VISIT FROM Vincent. The personnel of the Round Table Conference had just been made public.

'The Princes will run the whole show,' Vincent decided. 'They've been able to send a strong team, that will pull together. Well, perhaps that isn't the worst that could happen for India.'

The two wives exchanged glances. 'I suppose,' said Frances wearily, 'if you are in India there really *is* nothing to talk about but shooting and politics.'

'You are not to drag Robin back into politics,' Hilda warned her husband. 'We are watching him as closely as Temperance Reformers watch a converted drunkard.'

'It isn't politics, when you get on to politics in India now,' Vincent retorted. 'It's life itself; and what's going to happen to you? Any fool can see how the next year is going to run. The magnates of the Bombay Yacht Club, alarmed because they can't sell their shoddy as they used to, and can't get their bills paid, are squailing for the fullest surrender. Let the Congress have any last thing it wants, so long as it consents to make peace! And the rank and file of our Europeans in Calcutta are squealing in the opposite sense—put down all this nonsense with a firm hand, clap everyone in jail, go back to the Middle Ages, and sequester the Congress Funds. Just when we had our people out here decent, and anxious to hold out friendly but at the same time self-respecting hands to the folk they had to live with! For two pins Bombay and Calcutta would declare war on each other. And

I believe the Indians would join with the sahebs, in each place. Bengal is in blue terror of the spectre that has been called up. She hasn't forgotten the anarchy of Partition days—and here it is back again, at her doors, thanks to the insane folly of Gandhi and his drivers!'

'I know,' said Alden. 'All that you say is true. But I've changed my views, Vincent. It's only anarchy that ever teaches anyone any sense.'

'The whole Province is full of revolvers. Anyone who can raise the price can buy them in Calcutta. It's true the price is a fancy one. But that's exactly why they can get them from the sailors—'

'What sailors?' asked his wife.

'Aren't there the Italian lines, and the Hansa lines, and the Jap lines—even supposing that you have to assume that every British sailor is immune from temptation? And the reason they had to put off the announcement of the Round Table names was that the Delegates wanted, some of them, to have all their arrangements made for flight. They've been smuggling themselves out of the country before they could be stopped.'

'I know,' repeated Robin patiently. 'But I've got to be emeritus from all this. The job has got beyond us. We've done all we could, barring mistakes that are bound to come. I'll take my hat off to Irwin when I'm in Eternity, for this last year. You can't fight

against the *bhuts*. History, no doubt, will say this and that, will find good reasons for everything. But it's the *bhuts* that have worked madness in men's brains; and it doesn't depend now on whether we can coax Gandhi or the Nehrus into some sanity, but on whether the *bhuts* have got beyond all human conciliation.'

Hamar put his hand to his head. 'Do I hear right?' he asked. 'Has Rob gone mad? Or have I?'

'You have neither of you gone mad,' Hilda assured him. 'You are both of you two thoroughly stupid, but also thoroughly sound and dear men, who've been working too hard and taking yourselves and India too seriously. Robin is the first to pull through. He's quite right about the *bhuts*. The whole matter is now in celestial hands—or demoniac hands, if you like. The *bhuts* have got to thrash it out with the Spirit of the Age, whether India is to stay in the Empire or not.'

'They are all in conclave now,' said Robin. 'Somewhere in the forest there's a Parliament, of Padalsini, Mother Ganges, Mother Indus, the *thakurs* of the forest trees, the *bhuts* of the wayside, the *devatas* of the upper and lower air. And with them there are the ghosts of Klemmon Sahib and of many an old colonel and tea-planter and indigo-planter besides, and of Nikal Scyn and Ochterlony, very fierce and decided. But they can't impose their will there, it has to go by

argument. They have their right of place there, only because it was in India that they died. They grip the soil as the *bhuts* do; they have their bones in it. While the Round Table confers, these will be conferring also. And the future will go, not by what the Round Table Conference decides, but by what Nikal Seyn and Padalsini decide. I thought I had to take a share in worrying it out. But I've learnt otherwise. I've settled my own stand, the only stand that matters to me. And the rest of the business can go and chase itself.'

'I'll see you when you get back from furlough,' said Hamar, 'and find out if this resolution still holds.'

'All the same,' Hamar added presently, 'I think I know what you mean, and I think I agree. It won't take so very much more of this nonsense to convince our people of what you and I know already, that this Indian job has ceased to be worth the infinite bother it has become, and all the hatred and lying and misery it brings along. They're not our race, they don't think our thoughts. Why the devil were we ever tied up with them, and sent revolving on the same wheel of destiny? I half believe the *bhuts* will decide that our time is up.'

'No, they won't,' said Robin, with sudden energy. 'Not yet. You'll see that—'

But his sister-in-law closed down his predictions, whatever they were going to be. 'I don't like that wild

look in your eye, Robin. I *thought* your conversion had something fishy about it. It didn't ring quite true, somehow. And now my husband has set you all on fire again! Neither of you is to say another word about politics! They are not a matter for decent men, in any case—least of all in India. Let the diehard and the congresswalla wrangle among themselves. But you two, remember that you have higher duties and destinies.'

## LV

THEY HAD TO RETURN TO VISHNUGRAM, FRANCES TO pack, Robin to gather up threads and to say good-byes.

The Bengali nation has a genius for valedictory occasions, and the College made what Alden rightly called an absurd fuss about his going. He did not overassess it; he had known professors who were absolute nonentities regaled with poems that spoke of bitter heart-break, and with speeches that began 'Though heart is full of woe and voice is choked with sorrow,' and passed unfalteringly through period after period of eloquence. It was, however, pleasant to see smiling faces again; for long enough, while he was away, the students had occupied themselves principally with renewed attempts to hoist the National flag on College buildings. In emulation of Mr. Gandhi's Nine Points, they had

presented Douglas with an ultimatum, whose first point was that all College funds should be made over to the administration of a group to be elected from among themselves. This was tactfully sent through the post. It was unsigned.

Alden was particularly cheered to receive, on behalf of his wife, a magnificent table-cloth, of intricate and glorious workmanship, inscribed in its centre with letters of gold and scarlet: 'God bless Rev. R. Alden, Esq., B.A. Lond., M.A. Oxon., and Madam.' The President of the Independant Students' Association also contributed his word of forgiveness and recognition:

'At time of parture and sundering of sweet ties of Bossom afection it is well not to dwell on sorrowfull past. Sad to say, you are going. You have nobly striven against great odds and ends. You are enshrinned in every creek and corner of hart. In words of poet thou art a man, take him for all in all, we shall not see upon his like again. As the cucoo hails the return of spring (of the revolving year) so do we early return of your kind honour. Your students which are voice of esteemed Alma Mater pray that by blessing of God you will be made stout and strong.'

'He has it,' said Robin. 'I *have* been striving against great odds and ends. It's the ends that have worried

me most. Is there anywhere, in the whole wide world, a raggeder job than the Englishman's in India?"

"Why did you choose it?" Frances asked him, smiling.

"I didn't choose it. It was on my forehead. Listen. In my last incarnation I turned a machine-gun on to a flock of cows and Brahmins as they were entering the Ganges to bathe. That minute of careless, unthinking pleasure was my undoing. The Demiurge, after a lingering frown which raised tornadoes in all parts of the globe and wrecked a whole fleet of planets elsewhere, decided that the only fit punishment was to make me teach the sons of Brahmins how to paraphrase Meeleton and Shekspeer and to chase cows out of my painfully raised vegebottle garden. And to strive against great odds and ends generally."

Douglas gave him words of warning as to his actions on furlough.

"You ought to rest all you can, old man. Don't let them send you out on deputation until you've been at home for a good three months at least. And I shouldn't go to that place Bacup, under any circumstances. I left it in high dungcon."

Robin reassured him. "I fancy, from various hints I've had, that our Mission Board will use me for deputation work only with the greatest reluctance and as a last resort, when every other string to the Gospel Bow has snapped. They have already written that they mean to give me what they call an excep-

tional rest. I haven't had a single invitation to talk at Laymen's Retreats or Swanwick or any other place where the godly congregate. Douglas, do you mind if I tell you that I don't believe any man ever had a better colleague than I've had in you?'

'Mind? I can't tell you the pleasure it gives me that you should say that,' said Douglas, flushing up like a boy.

Alden did the round of the station, carrying words of comfort to all. He had help for the Collector and for Ahmad, Hamar's successor. For Mayhew he had a special mission of consolation. A fortnight before, Douglas had been early at Mayhew's for tennis; and, as the two men were waiting, a dog in a state of foulest decrepitude had entered the compound. This dog was in the habit of sleeping on Mayhew's bed, whenever it could; and all efforts to kill it had failed. Seizing the chance of an ally, Mayhew gave Douglas a gun. 'You go round that side of the house, and I'll take this.' A minute later, a terrific roar followed. The gun had gone off as Douglas was conducting a stalk through Mrs. Mayhew's drawing-room, from Mayhew's office. A comprehensive bag amid lesser game included her piano.

Mayhew, ruefully half-laughing over the relics of the battue, pointed out a photograph. 'I don't know why I still keep it up there. It's pretty well shot to pieces.'

'But that's the bright side of the whole affair! Isn't it one of these awful farewells? You're in the comic garb that we enjoin for state occasions; the Indians are in their own amazing combination of evening dress minus tie and collar and plus pyjamas. Every retired Indian official in Oxford or Tonbridge has his own special private room decorated with these figures of fun. I'm not knocking it, Mayhew. I quite realise that Providence intended that Indians and ourselves should each provide the other with a number of first-class absurdities. But you really have enough without this one.'

## LVI

TO HILDA AND VINCENT, AT THE STEAMER, HE SAID:  
'It's a silly finish, this being discharged as a shattered brain and body, for which India has no further use. Returned missionary! I'm afraid it nearly always should be, returned empty!. "This is the way the world ends—not with a bang, but a whimper!"'

'No, it doesn't,' said Hilda. 'Rob, you're finishing true to form, talking rubbish. If we do go out, we shall see that a lot of other things smash as well.'

'There speaks the British warrior queen!'

'Yes, if you are going to use the word *whimper* in connection with anyone who belongs to me. As if you weren't the most utterly typical John Bull that ever infested India!'

'Thank you for these truly heartening words, lady! And, if one must speak truth—'

'Why do it with such reluctance?'

'I don't strike you as a Stoic, do I?'

'Not exactly.'

'Vincent, what is your opinion of the English civilisation?'

'You really want all that—now?'

'All right. The English tradition, if you prefer it that way. Is there anything that makes you proud of it?'

'Yes,' said Vincent, thinking. 'I suppose I *am* a bit proud to belong to the austorest tradition the world has seen since the Greeks.'

'He's got it in a sentence. I knew he had brains somewhere,' said Robin exultantly. 'Not for nothing do I.C.S. associations keep on assuring a grateful nation that theirs is the most wonderfully endowed service the world has ever seen. Perhaps we *are* going to be smashed. Perhaps the Age *is* sick of us. Who cares? It's a grand going out, with the unseen forces all massing against us.'

"The Spartans on the sea-wet rock sat down  
and combed their hair".

'But there's nothing austere about you, Robin,' said his brother-in-law.

'I don't agree with you,' said Hilda. 'Robin keeps his hair-shirt out of sight. Doesn't he, Frankie? Frankie knows.'

'I did so want,' said Robin, 'to have hung on a bit longer, and have taken furlough in 1932.'

'What's going to be the particular attraction of 1932?' asked Vincent.

'Why, I want to do my hook and crook to be present in the Sheldonian when Mahatma Gandhi turns up for his Doctorate of Law. Heaven send us a sunny June! For a loin-cloth won't be adequate in the average Oxford June.'

'Robin, Robin!' said Hilda. 'It's nice to see you cheerful, but this is carrying hopefulness to the pitch of imbecility.'

'All the same,' he said, 'it ought to have happened, if, first of all, *we* had been sane; and then, if *he* had been sanc.'

'Frankie says nothing, she only smiles,' said Hilda. 'But come back, Robin, to India, for the sake of what you bring with you. Don't forget, your wife and child are nine-tenths of the attraction that lies in the idea of getting you back.'

'I'll come back. Alive or dead: For, if I ever die in England, some P. & O. will carry a spook stowaway.'

'But what shall we do with you dead?'

'Set apart a shrine for me. It must be somewhere that will satisfy the ghost of John also, that we may walk the jungles together, and do great good to all the countryside. There must be a dry river-bed; and a stretch of unpolled sal-forest. There must be a

specially planted copse of pomegranates allowed to merge into the wild. Not less than three bushes of the Indian laburnum. And a long heath open to the white Indian sunset. And a notice, in English, Sanskrit, Hindi, and Bengali, must warn everyone who walks there that he must put his gun aside, and slay neither bird nor beast. And John and I will watch the bears gather the mohwa flowers, and the crows squabble in the simul bowls, and the parrots race overhead, and the hoopocs strut in the evening sunshine—everything good in its own sweet season.'

'That's an attractive programme for the ghost,' said Frances. 'But, if the ghost's wife may put in a belated word on behalf of herself and the ghost's child, it's a programme that holds no place for Betty and me.'

'Why,' he smiled, 'I'm not going to carry it out yet. I thought I was, but life is drawing me back with both hands. I only want now, while I can still bespeak it, to make sure of my eternal rest, with my body peaceful in the land that has fed my imagination. If I die, promise me the shrine, Hilda.'

'I promise,' she said.

'Promise three times, and make it an oath.'

'I promise. I promise. I promise.'





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